SHELLEY
THE MAN & THE POET

A. CLUTTON-BROCK

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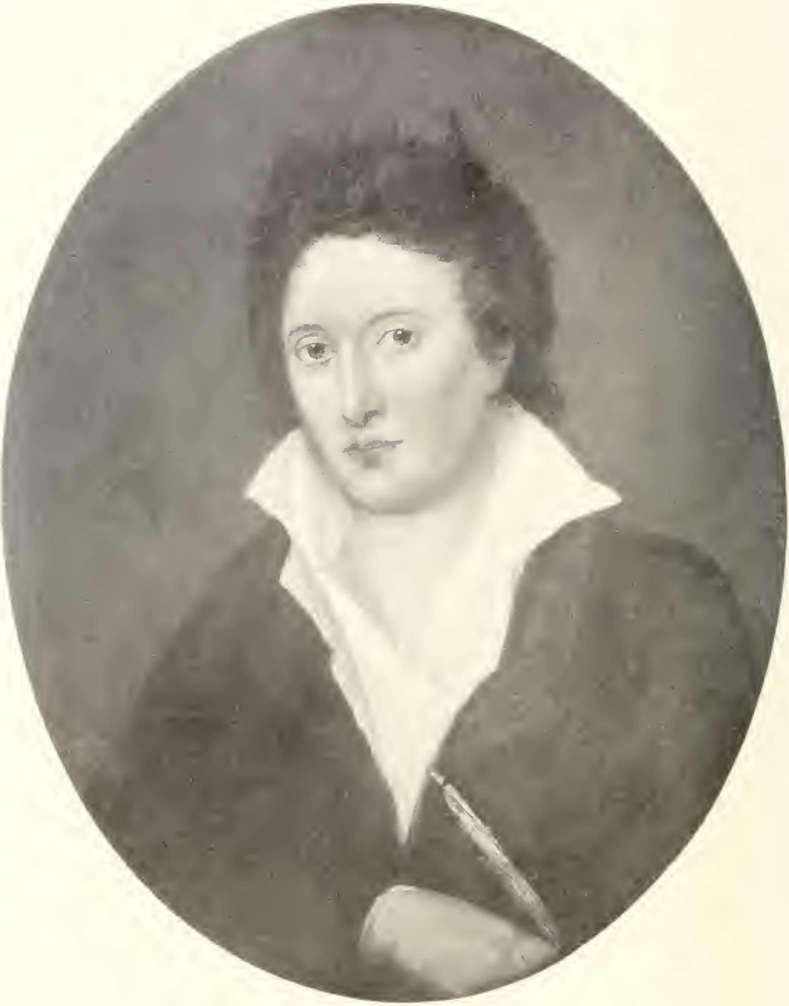

SHELLEY

FROM THE PAINTING BY MISS AMELIA CURRAN IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

SHELLEY

THE MAN AND THE POET

BY

A. CLUTTON-BROCK

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS

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PREFACE

I HAVE said what I owe to Professor Dowden's "Life of Shelley" in my Introduction. I am also indebted to Mr. W. M. Rossetti's Memoir, to Mr. Buxton Forman for his edition of Shelley's Prose Works, to Mrs. Marshall for her "Life of Mary Shelley," and to Mr. Bertram Dobell for his edition of "Shelley's Letters to Miss Hitchener." I have taken the text of the Poems from the excellent edition published by the Clarendon Press and edited by Mr. Thomas Hutchinson. My other obligations are so many that I cannot even remember them all. So I here make a general if unsatisfactory acknowledgment of them. I have also to thank the Editor of the *New Quarterly* for allowing me to incorporate part of an article which was published in that magazine in my chapter on Prometheus Unbound.

A. CLUTTON-BROCK

June 10, 1909

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INTRODUCTION

I HAVE to make some excuse for writing a book about Shelley when so many have been written already; and after considering several, all more or less plausible, I have resolved to tell the truth, which seems to be no excuse at all; for it is that I have written this book to please myself. This confession will, at any rate, account for the manner in which I have written it. It is not a complete biography, but contains only the facts about Shelley which have interested me or which I had to tell to make my story clear. The complete biography of Shelley has been written once and for all by Professor Dowden. His book contains a vast number of facts, collected with admirable industry, and stated, as it seems to me, with great fairness. I do not agree with all Professor Dowden's conclusions from those facts or with all his judgments upon Shelley's works; but I should be very ungrateful if I did not acknowledge how much my book owes to his.

He has told us, I suppose, nearly everything that is to be known about Shelley. My object has been, not to write a shorter book of the same kind, but to give a representation of Shelley based, as far as possible, upon original documents, that is to say, upon his own letters and works, and upon the writings of those who knew him. I have not chosen my facts with the object of defending or of attacking him. I have tried to represent him as he was, and to say exactly what I think of his character and poetry.

I have tried, in fact, to make a story of his life; and to this story I have added a running commentary upon his conduct, his ideas, and his writings. Some, perhaps, will think that I have spoilt the story with the commentary: but there is this difference between a story invented by a novelist and a true one—that the novelist's criticism of life is implied in his invention, and we do not want his explanations of a character he has made himself; whereas a real character and a true story are raw material which provoke criticism. I cannot invent actions or speeches to explain Shelley's character. Therefore I offer my comments and conjectures upon it.

It may seem to some readers that I have criticised Shelley's conduct and his works too freely, and as if I thought myself his equal in genius and in virtue. I have criticised him freely because I believe that all men, even the greatest, are imperfect in all things, and that unless we understand the nature of their imperfection we cannot understand the nature of their greatness. The interest of all life consists in the struggle between imperfect will and imperfect conditions, and all works of art, like all conduct, are results of that struggle and therefore in themselves imperfect. Many critics, attempting to prove Shakespeare a perfect artist, have completely misunderstood and misrepresented the greatness of his work, often praising him when he least deserves praise, and imagining some profound intention when there is merely a compromise with the imperfect conditions of the Elizabethan stage. There is no excuse for not seeing the imperfection of Shakespeare ; for it was evidently clear to Shakespeare himself that all art and all life must be imperfect ; and therefore he never aimed at any kind of perfection but rather at an economy of his artistic energy, taking the line of least resistance in less important matters so that he might have all his strength to spare for the more important. In this he was very English, and he had the English defect of taking the line of least resistance too often and submitting to compromise too gladly.

Shelley, both in his life and in his art, was all the other way. He was scarcely aware of imperfection in himself ; and when he found it in others and in external circumstances it seemed to him to be inexplicable evil, which ought to be, not improved, but abolished. Thus there is some excuse for those admirers of his who think him perfect ; and some even for those of his contemporaries who thought him a fiend incarnate. There was, or appeared to be, no conflict between different parts of his nature, but only a conflict between his nature and the world outside him. Whatever he did he seemed to do deliberately and as part of his plan of life. Therefore to Southey and others he appeared, like Lucifer, to cry "Evil, be thou my good," and, rather than serve in Heaven, to be ambitious of reigning in a Hell of his own making. They saw that he was not the average sensual man led into sin by the ordinary temptations of the flesh; for such men are ashamed of their weakness, but Shelley was ashamed of nothing. Indeed he was always writing both prose and verse to prove that he was right in all he did. So the excuses that are made for shamefaced sinners, especially if well-born, were not made for him. He was not the only man of his time who ran away from his wife with another woman; but the others were not against marriage altogether, nor did they call themselves Atheists or Republicans. Most Englishmen then, frightened by the Terror, thought that Atheism, Republicanism, and what we now call Free Love, were all symptoms of a new kind of wickedness which threatened to destroy society. They were only too glad to make an example of Shelley as a monster in whom all these symptoms were united; while he himself, condemned as consistent in vice, was the more firmly convinced of his consistency in virtue. After his death, when the fears caused by the French Revolution died away and his music began to enchant the world, the old legend of a Shelley with horns and a tail gave way to a new one of a Shelley with wings and a halo. This has been accepted even by his detractors, and Matthew Arnold made skilful use of it when he called him a beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain.

Most of the angels of art have been ineffectual ever since the eclectic painters of Bologna first set the fashion of trying to make them look perfectly beautiful. The beauty which they represented was all negative, since they had no earthly models for it; and now the very word angel puts us in mind of something tiresome, of a being in a white gown and with useless wings, that can do nothing except look wistful and sympathetic. When Arnold called Shelley a beautiful and ineffectual angel, no doubt this kind of angel was in his mind. He was ready to forego all criticism of Shelley, because he would not regard him as a human being.

I am not prepared to emasculate him thus. In this book I treat him as a human being and try to prove that he was one, full of character and energy and charm, interesting because of his very imperfections, because of the ceaseless struggle of his not omnipotent will. It was a part of his imperfection that he believed his will to be omnipotent over his own nature, and saw no reason why it should not be omnipotent over the outside world. He never, in the course of his short life, attained to a full consciousness of himself; never knew that there was any impulse in him except that of will. He was not aware of the animal that existed in him as in all men. He mistook his appetites and instincts for will; they seemed to him to be all spiritual, and he has represented them as spiritual in his poetry. Will in him was very powerful, and the desire for a nobler state of being always predominant in his mind; so predominant indeed that all his other desires seemed to him to be lost in it, and he thought of the passion of love as a passion only for a nobler state of being. Thus whatever might hinder his passion of love seemed to him to hinder his passion for a nobler state of being, and so to be mere tyranny. He did not grasp the fact that there is a necessary conflict between our appetites and the conditions of our being, and that this conflict gives an opportunity for the exercise of will. He saw that such a conflict existed, but thought that it was produced altogether by some external tyranny or some inexplicable perversity in men. There seemed to him to be a perfect harmony in himself, and so he thought that a perfect harmony was possible in the world, if only it would get rid of those inhibitions which express men's consciousness of an existing discord. Thus he was early drawn into flat rebellion against things as they are, partly by his ardent desire for a nobler state of being, partly by his failure to recognise the necessary imperfection of life. To him life seemed to consist entirely of a conflict between good will, such as he felt in himself, and evil will in irrational and inexplicable opposition to the good. This conception of life he expressed in his "Prometheus Unbound," where the evil will of the Universe is personified as Jupiter and the good will as Prometheus; and he expressed it again in "The Cenci," where Count Cenci is inexplicably wicked. Indeed his poetry is full of fiends who inflict tortures and of angels who suffer them.

Now whatever our views of life may be, we cannot but feel that this is not a true representation of it. It is not entirely a struggle between opposing wills. Good will is not supreme in any hero nor evil in any villain, neither is any kind of will supreme in our external conditions. Rather in all men will is very imperfect, never complete master of instincts and appetites, never quite sure of its own purpose. There is in all life a great deal of energy that is not subject to will at all or only half subject to it, not because that energy is evil but because will is imperfect; and no one can understand either mankind or himself unless he can distinguish between the action of will and the action of mere instincts and appetites. There are some who, because will is imperfect, deny its existence altogether, and see in life and in the societies and polities of men only a blind, mechanical process, the nature of which is concealed from us all by a process of illusion inherent in life itself. Shelley, as I have said, went to the opposite extreme. To him life seemed to be all will, sometimes good, sometimes evil. Therefore, to bring about the millennium, only one thing was needed, namely to change evil will into good. And since he seemed to himself to be all good will he wanted the world to be possessed by a will like his own. But experience taught him that he could not persuade the world to have a will just like his own. So he came to think of himself, not with conceit but with a sad wonder, as altogether different from other men; and he got the habit of imagining private millenniums of his own, in a cave or on a desert island, to which he would escape from the world with a beautiful woman and spend there an eternity of delight in her company. This ideal was dictated to him only partly by his will and partly by his instincts and appetites. But it seemed to him to be a perfect ideal because he thought it was all dictated to him by his will. So when he imagined a millennium for the human race it was of this kind and impossible, not only as a fact but as a prophecy, because it assumed that an everlasting delight could be got from a satisfaction of instincts and appetites which can only, in the nature of things, afford a passing delight. The millennium, to be true as prophecy, must consist in the continual and triumphant exercise of will. There is more prophetic truth in "News from Nowhere" than in the end of "Prometheus Unbound"; more even in the idea of a Heaven where we shall all sing hymns for ever. That will at least be "a joy in widest commonalty spread," whereas the joy which Shelley imagines is fugitive and cloistered, withdrawing happy pairs into solitude, not uniting them in some victorious and concordant exercise of will.

But we must always remember that he died before he reached the age of thirty. His life is only a fragment, and we must judge it as we should judge an unfinished work of art which promises nobly. No man under thirty could know enough about life to imagine a satisfactory millennium. We can only learn the relative values of things from experience, and Shelley had only the experience of youth. He thought he was master of a complete philosophy; but much of it was second-hand and had not grown out of his knowledge either of himself or of life outside himself. Thus it is not in his philosophising that he tells the truth about himself, for in that he makes himself out much older than he was, but in the immortal music that expresses the delights and desires of his youth.

It is in Shelley's poetry that we see him as he appeared to those who knew him. In that he has expressed himself to all posterity as he expressed himself by speech and gesture and the light of his countenance to his own familiar friends. He did not seem to them an ineffectual angel, though strangely unlike other men. He seemed a being possessed by some great purpose, not yet clear to himself perhaps, but shining through all his words and actions. And we find the same purpose in his poetry, and in that rebellion against mere routine and the brute force of circumstance in which his life was spent. For all beautiful things seem to be above routine and to triumph over circumstance; and their beauty inspirits us because we feel it to be a symptom of some high purpose and significance, even though we may not see clearly what they are. The ugliest things are those which evidently have no purpose or significance, such as scrap-heaps or litter of any kind. Dirt is ugly just because it is matter in the wrong place; and so all the works of man are ugly which express base submission to the mere routine of life. The transcendent beauty of Shelley's poetry, the transcendent interest of his life, both come from the fact that never for a moment would he submit to routine. There are some artists who only rebel against routine in their art. They are content to leave reality as it is, provided they can represent a life more beautiful and more full of purpose and significance in their art. Shelley was not one of these. There was the same incessant effort in his life as in his art, and a close connection between them. If his art is visionary, so was his life. If he wrote Platonic love poems, he tried to behave like a Platonic lover. If he described the millennium, he tried to behave as if the millennium had come to pass. And in his worst errors he was far more admirable and less mischievous than those who persuade us to submit to the mere mechanism of life by their own comfortable submission to it. These insidiously tempt us away from our energies and hopes with the bait of their own low prosperity. They are like cats purring by the hearth on a wild day, who discourage us from venturing out of doors. There are some lives which have the dulness and ugliness of scrap-heaps because there seems to be no purpose or significance in them, nothing except instinct which, if it fails, has no consolation in its failure, and, if it succeeds, only seems to justify mechanical theories of life.

The admirers of Shelley have often seemed to contend that he ought not to be judged by the standard of ordinary morality. There, I think, they do an injustice either to him or to that standard. Ordinary morality, that is to say, the morality of the great mass of decent, sensible men, is often supposed to be mainly prohibitive, because it is confused with law which, quite rightly, confines itself to expressing morality in negative terms. Saint Just, at the height of the Terror, wished to make friendship a public institution. Every citizen on coming of age was to proclaim his friends and, if he had none, to be banished. Laws of that kind would only work where they were unnecessary, and Saint Just got his head cut off for his pains. We have no right to assume that a morality which is expressed negatively in the law is itself negative; and, as a matter of fact, the morality of most men is mainly positive. They like a man for what he does, not for what he refrains from doing; and in that they only follow the teaching of Christ. Shelley is better liked than any poet of his time because of his positive virtues. Judged by the standard of ordinary morality he comes off so well that no one need fear to apply it to him. He was loved by all who knew him well, and his friends were men of various characters, some of them not at all ready to love any one. Byron was more apt to hate than to love; but he spoke of Shelley far more warmly than of any other man, calling him again and again the best and least selfish man he had ever known. And Shelley's unselfishness was not a mere yielding. It did not come from want of will or character. He was as ardent in well-doing as in writing verses, and self-willed even in self-sacrifice. He charms us, as he charmed his friends, because he was so free from the negative vices; and his charm only fails on those rare occasions when he gives way to the negative vices, when he ceases to love and expresses his coldness in cold platitudes. Then sometimes he becomes self-righteous and talks like that shabby philosopher, Godwin. He always thought that his affections were quite reasonable, and therefore never suspected that there might be an irrational cause for their decline. His main fault, in the disaster of his first marriage, was that he ceased to love his wife and could not exercise his will and reason to maintain his love for her. In this matter, and in a few other cases of less importance, he shocks us because he is unlike himself, because he seems unkind and cold and perverse. I have insisted upon this point in the course of my narrative, not because I wish to make a case against Shelley, but because it seems to me that a false case has been made for him. There is no question of the privileges of genius or of passion, for Shelley showed no genius at that unhappy time. He was doing nothing for the good of the world. It was fickleness, not passion, that led him astray; and like all fickleness, which is so often mistaken for passion, it arose, not from excess of love but from a failure of love; for he would never have fallen in love with Mary unless he had fallen out of love with Harriet. There are a hundred excuses to be made for him; but they remain excuses, not justifications; and it is a pity that he should have tried to justify himself, for in doing so he showed the worst of himself.

Those who would advance a noble cause or glorify the memory of a great man should make it a point of honour to beware of sophistries. Any argument is good enough for a bad cause, but only the best will serve a good one. Truth exposes even the lies that are told in support of it; and the virtues of a hero confound whatever attempts are made to justify his faults. It may be that in trying to avoid one extreme I have fallen into another and insisted too much upon the faults of my hero. But even if that is so, I would rather seem unjust to him myself than set others against him by my own partiality.

SHELLEY

THE MAN AND THE POET

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD AND BOYHOOD

IT has often been said that Shelley came of a stock of commonplace country gentlemen. This is not true. Our knowledge of the family is small, but the few facts we know about Timothy Shelley, his father, and Bysshe Shelley, his grandfather, prove that they were odd, if not remarkable. Bysshe Shelley was born in America in 1731, where, according to Medwin,[1] the poet's cousin, he began life as a quack doctor. If that is so, he must have given up the trade very soon; for at the age of twenty-one he was in England, where he ran away at once with an heiress, to whom he is said to have been married by the Parson of the Fleet. His first wife died young, and after a decent interval he ran away with another heiress, whom he also survived. Fortunate, like Austria, in his marriages, he became a very rich man, and in 1806 was made a baronet for his services to the Whigs. Medwin tells us that he was a remarkably handsome man, fully six feet high, and with a noble and aristocratic bearing, but adds that "his life was unredeemed by one good action." Shelley wrote of him in 1812: "He is a complete Atheist, and builds all his hopes on annihilation. He has acted very ill to three wives.[2] He is a bad man. I never had any respect for him. I always regarded him as a curse on society. I shall not grieve at his death; I will not wear mourning. I will not attend his funeral. I shall think of his departure as that of a hard-hearted reprobate." But the very lady to whom this was written was then the sister of Shelley's soul and afterwards a brown demon.

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[1] Medwin is not to be trusted either for facts or for judgment.

[2] There is a vague story of a first wife in America.

It may be only the misfortune of Sir Bysshe that we know no good of him. He was a man about whom legends would gather easily. He spent £80,000 upon building Castle Goring in Sussex, but lived himself in a miserly way in a cottage at Horsham with one servant to wait on him. He would often sit in the taproom of an inn, not drinking, but talking politics. He had a liking for Shelley and paid for the printing of some of his childish writings. But he disliked his own son Timothy, and would swear at him whenever Timothy came to visit him in his cottage. Indeed Hogg says that Shelley learnt to curse his father from his grandfather. When Sir Bysshe died in 1815, bank notes to the amount of £10,000 were found in his room, some in his books, some in the folds of his sofa, some sewn into the lining of his dressing-gown. We know nothing about him except his oddities, so that he seems more like a character in an artificial comedy than a real man.

Timothy Shelley, the poet's father, was born in 1753, so that he was sixty-two when he succeeded to the baronetcy and the large fortune which Sir Bysshe had increased by saving. It appears that he got no good from his father beyond money and the title in his old age, and that Shelley got little good from him. He seems to have had a better heart and a worse understanding than Sir Bysshe. He was at University College, Oxford, and then made the Grand Tour, from which he brought back, according to Medwin, "a smattering of French, and a bad picture of an eruption of Vesuvius." His letters show that he had little education and no natural power of expressing himself in words. Yet he professed to be a disciple of Chesterfield and La Rochefoucauld, and had "a certain *air*, miscalled that of the old school, which he could put off and on as occasion served." Medwin says that he once told Shelley "he would provide for as many natural children as he chose to get, but that he would never forgive his making a mésalliance." All who have written about him insist upon his unfitness to be the father of Shelley, but Shelley would have been a difficult son for a sage. Timothy seems to have tried to do his duty by his son, but he had no idea how to do it; and he could never induce his son, or probably any one else, to take him seriously. No doubt he amused those over whom he had no power. To his son he seemed a mere nuisance. Shelley, from an early age, was fastidious about manners and appearance; and his father was absurd in both. Shelley could love no one whom he did not think perfect; and his father's imperfections were obvious. Shelley, like a clever girl, expected every one to be quite consistent; and his father had no consistency. He would profess the most liberal opinions and then play the tyrant in trifles. He thought himself an *esprit fort*, but was afraid of the world. To Shelley he seemed morally, intellectually, and æsthetically contemptible, a symbol of all that irrational authority against which it was his duty to rebel. Shelley's moral sense was precociously and morbidly developed. Every question for him was one of morals; and whatever he disliked he thought was wicked. Thus he mistook his irritation against his father for moral disgust and indulged it without restraint. And no doubt the father saw the son sitting in judgment upon him with blind resentment. But there seems to have been more natural affection in the father than in the son. There is little sign in any of Shelley's letters or recorded sayings that he had any tenderness for his father, whereas it is clear that his father tried to do his duty by him. They were fatally estranged because Shelley would not give him credit for this. He was too much in love with abstract perfection to love or to make any allowances for the concrete imperfection of his father; and since he turned every one he knew into a character of romance, he turned his father, who was quite unfitted for the part, into a villain of melodrama.

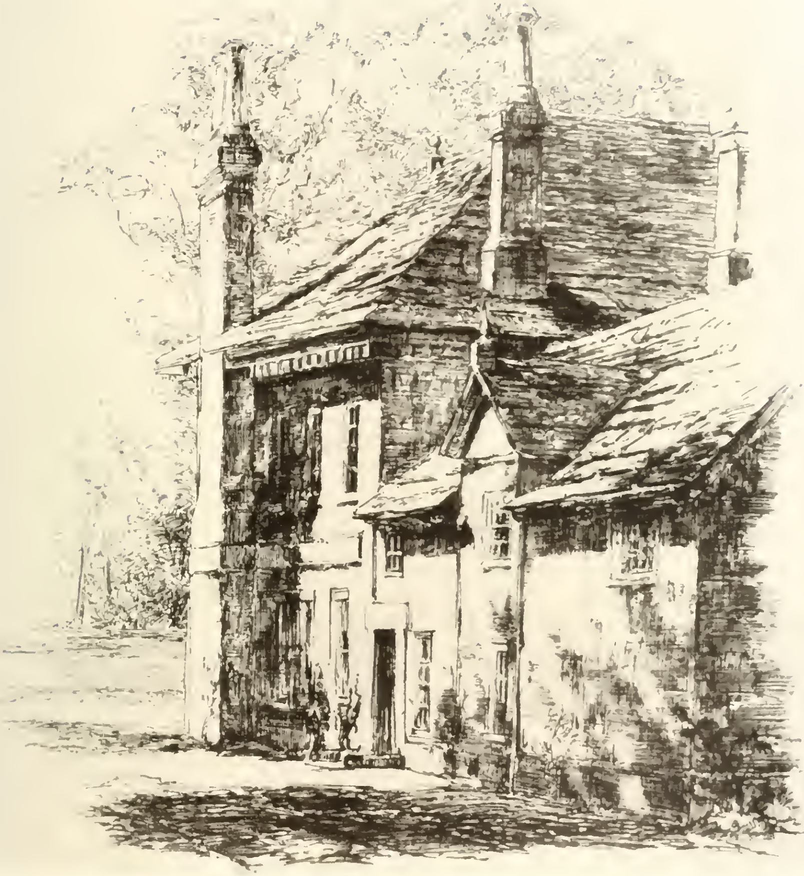
Little is known of Shelley's mother. She was a Miss Pilfold of Effingham in Surrey, and married Timothy in 1791. She is said to have been beautiful in her youth.

She had better abilities than her husband, but no taste for literature. Shelley called her mild and tolerant, but narrow-minded. She wished him to be a sportsman, and would send him out with a keeper to fish or shoot. The keeper did the necessary slaughter, while Shelley read a book.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, the eldest child of the marriage, was born in August 4, 1792. The rest of the family consisted of five daughters, one of whom died in infancy, and another son, John, who was born in 1806, and lived to the age of sixty. While Bysshe Shelley lived in a cottage at Horsham, his son Timothy inhabited Field Place, in the parish of Warnham, about two miles away. Here Shelley was born and spent his childhood. The house, built in the eighteenth century, has some dignity. Not far away is St. Leonard's Forest, still a wild place, with the legend of a serpent that moved upon feet and was three yards long. In the garden of Field Place there was a real snake of unusual size that was said to have outlived several generations of men. Shelley often spoke of it; and it was perhaps the origin of his liking for serpents, though the curse laid upon them in Genesis would account for that.

We get most of the stories of Shelley's childhood from his sister Hellen. They might be told of any clever child without arousing expectation of genius. It is clear that he began early to live in a romance of his own, as unlike real life as he could make it. Many children do this; but boys usually sacrifice it to reality when they go to a private school; girls, when they marry, if not before.

Shelley's life of romance did not end with school. Indeed it thickened about him as he grew up, and all facts were moulded and coloured to suit it. At first, of course, it was all invention. He would take his little sisters on his knee and tell them wonderful and dreadful stories. He said that a closed garret under the roof was inhabited by an alchemist with a long beard, and that a great tortoise lived in Warnham Pond and made any strange noise that



FIELD PLACE

FROM AN ENGRAVING BY ARTHUR EVERSHED

might be heard. He would dress himself and his sisters up to represent fiends or spirits. Like many clever children he would describe events which had never happened. Once he gave minute details of a visit he had paid to some ladies, and it was discovered almost at once to be all an invention. He was fond, as in later years, of any kind of make-believe and mystification. Once he was discovered setting out disguised as a countryman with a truss of hay, which he was going to take to a young lady at Horsham, that she might have some hay tea for her chilblains. Once he called on a neighbour and asked in the Sussex dialect to be employed as a gamekeeper's boy. The neighbour engaged him, whereupon he betrayed himself by bursting into laughter.

There is nothing in all this to wonder at. Some children are content with realistic make-believe. They pretend to garden in the nursery, or to fish on the lawn. Others want to do what they have never done, or to see what no one ever has seen. Shelley liked both kinds of make-believe, but he pushed his realism as far as he could, and tried to get some new experience out of it. There is more significance in the fact that he "commenced his studies in chemistry" at an early age, and proposed to cure Hellen's chilblains with an electric shock. His early passion for science was more unusual than his early passion for unreality. No doubt he was drawn to science by its promise of wonders more than by its promise of truth. He was nearer to an alchemist than to a chemist. But still his brain was busy and he was eager to learn.

He was affectionate to every one except his father. His sister Margaret remembered how he came back from school once in term time to be nursed of an illness, and how he kissed her through a pane of glass in the dining-room window. It is both pleasant and sad to hear these simple stories of the childhood of one who lost his home so early, and was a wanderer all the days of his life.

His childhood at least seems to have been happy. He had high spirits, and was "full of cheerful fun." His sister Hellen preserved a poem on a cat which he wrote when eight years old. It begins—

"A cat in distress,
Nothing more nor less;
Good folks, I must faithfully tell ye;
As I am a sinner,
It waits for some dinner
To stuff out its own little belly."

It then turns to a satirical description of the various wants of humanity, and ends thus—

"But this poor little cat
Only wanted a rat,
To stuff out its own little maw;
And it were as good
Some people had such food,
To make them hold their jaw."

There is no promise of genius in this, but it is easier to read than the verses which Shelley wrote some years afterwards.

At six years old Shelley began to learn Latin of a Welsh clergyman. At ten he was sent as a boarder to Sion House Academy at Isleworth, where he found his second cousin and future biographer, Thomas Medwin, who was some years older than himself. Medwin gives us a conventional account of the schooldays of a poet. With the other boys, he says, Shelley passed for a strange, unsocial being, but he himself very easily learned to penetrate into this soul sublime. Another fellow-pupil remembered Shelley as "like a girl in boy's clothes, fighting with open hands, and rolling on the floor when flogged, not from the pain, but from a sense of indignity." The Headmaster was a Doctor Greenlaw, a Scot, "not wanting in good qualities, but very capricious in his temper." He did not like Shelley, because Shelley would not laugh at his jokes. It was at Sion House that Shelley first got a taste for the romantic tales of Anne Radcliffe and other writers of the same kind, who were then very popular. After reading them he had fearful dreams, and walked in his sleep, for which he was punished. He also became precociously sentimental. At the age of eleven or twelve he would talk with a friend of the ladies with whom they were in love. "I remember," he said afterwards, "that our practice was to confirm each other in the everlasting fidelity in which we had bound ourselves towards them, and towards each other. I recollect thinking my friend exquisitely beautiful. Every night, when we parted to go to bed, we kissed each other like children, as we still were." This pretty passage seems to prove that Shelley never went through the ordinary prosaic stage of boyhood. On the one hand, he had the vague dreams of a youth; on the other, the delicate simplicity of a child. In many things he was more like a girl than a boy.

It was also at Sion House that he got his first enthusiasm for science, from hearing some lectures on chemistry and astronomy. He was "delighted at the idea of a plurality of worlds." He looked at Saturn through a telescope, and, unlike most astronomers, found in its atmosphere "an irrefragable proof of its being inhabited like our globe." He was "enchanted with the idea that we, as spirits, should make the grand tour through the heavens."

He often seems to be making that grand tour in his poetry, and to be better acquainted with the heavens than with the earth. The microscope interested him no less than the telescope, and "the mites in cheese, the wing of a fly, and the vermicular animalculæ in vinegar formed afterwards," says Medwin, "the subjects of many of our conversations."

No doubt astronomy, chemistry, and the tales of Anne Radcliffe all filled him with the same kind of wonder, and he delighted in the thought of love and apparitions as in the thought of unknown worlds. There was no one to teach him anything about this world. His father and mother seem early to have made up their minds that he was inexplicable. They could not make out why he took lonely walks at night. They sent an old servant to follow him; but he reported that "Master Bysshe only took a walk and came back again." He wrote to his mother from school a long account of the admirable qualities of the friend with whom he used to talk about love. "I suppose she thought me out of my mind," he says, "for she returned no answer to my letter."

Being thus unheeded no doubt he withdrew more and more into his own thoughts, and his mind developed in secrecy, until its strange condition was suddenly revealed in action, to the anger and dismay of his parents.

The world and its institutions are made even more for the average child than for the average man. Abnormal men can only be at ease in it when they know that they are abnormal, and have learnt by experience when to submit and when to resist. But the abnormal child is always in danger of coming into blind conflict with the world. Shelley avoided this conflict as best he could by living in a world of his own romance, or rather of the romances that he read. No doubt there was some promise of his future genius in the thoroughness with which he realised this unreal world; but there was also a great danger. Young ladies are often as romantic as he was; but they only write and think their crude romance. He lived and acted it, as soon as he got the chance to do so. Meanwhile he was feeding upon premature thoughts of love, as a spell that when it acted would make all the world wonderful and delightful to him.

Thus when, in 1804, he went to Eton at the age of twelve he was as little fitted for a public school as any boy well could be. He was known as mad Shelley. He is said to have led a rebellion of small boys against fagging. He was called "the Atheist," and this, according to Hogg, was an official title given to him, not because he did not believe in God, but because he was a daring rebel. He was once the principal in a fight, and walked about beforehand reciting lines from Homer; but they brought him no luck, for he was easily defeated. He would not play games, and was sometimes "baited like a maddened bull." Yet Mary Shelley says that he formed several sincere friendships at Eton, and that, although disliked by the masters and hated by older boys, he was admired by his equals. Hogg tells us that he had many books given to him by friends when he left Eton, according to a pleasant custom of the school now obsolete; and that Etonians often came to see him at Oxford. He would tell his friends, as he had told his sisters, wonderful stories of ghosts and fairies, and speculated much "about the world beyond the grave." His lessons are said to have been child's-play to him, though his Latin verses were full of false quantities. He made violent and dangerous experiments in chemistry, and bought a galvanic battery which his tutor once laid hold of, receiving a shock which flung him back against the wall. He would send up fire balloons, and tried to draw lightning from the skies with an electric kite. Altogether he must have got some pleasure from his schooldays.

At Eton he made the acquaintance of a Dr. Lind, who had some reputation as a surgeon and physician, though, like Shelley, he was inclined to violent experiments. Shelley said afterwards that he was exactly what an old man ought to be, free, calm-spirited, full of benevolence and even of youthful ardour. Shelley also had a wild story to the effect that once when he was recovering from a brain fever, the proper complaint for a hero of romance, a servant overheard his father planning to send him to a private madhouse. The servant told Shelley of this design as he lay in bed. His horror was beyond words, but he had one hope.

He sent an express to Dr. Lind, who came to him at once, and dared his father to execute his purpose. "His menaces had the desired effect." Hogg thinks the story was a delusion produced by the fever. It took less than a fever to produce romantic delusions in Shelley's mind. This one is only worth mentioning because his father appeared in it as a melodramatic villain.

There is no doubt that Lind left a deep impression on Shelley's memory. Bagehot remarks that Shelley seems to have distrusted old men and was apt to make them wicked in his poems. The exceptions are the Hermit in "The Revolt of Islam," and Zonoras, the friend of Prince

Athanase. Dr. Lind was the model for both, though they do not give us a very lively idea of him.

Shelley was six years at Eton, and no doubt his mind grew rapidly there. He read many books, and appears to have been more interested in science and politics than in poetry. But science and politics were only raw material for his imagination. He was always a poet, or training himself to be one, even when most enthusiastic for reason and knowledge; for then he dreamed of the wonders that reason and knowledge would work in the world. He got his opinions and enthusiasms very easily. Indeed they seemed to come to him by nature, not by experience, as if he had been born with an idea ready made of what the world ought to be, and was always comparing reality with that. Thus he was never a literary poet like Keats, never absorbed either in reading or in writing poetry for its own sake. His main purpose, at least in his earlier years, was to remould the scheme of things nearer to his heart's desire; and when first we get a full and clear account of him we find him quite prepared to do this. The ordinary boy accepts life as it is as soon as he goes to school, and settles down to business, usually the business of games. Shelley accepted nothing. He judged the world already by his own standard and found it full of wrongs to be set right. He did not take experience as it came but went out to meet it; especially the experience of love, which he expected as eagerly as any heroine of romance.

There are several recollections of his boyhood in the poetry of his later years; and from two of these it appears that he twice experienced some kind of religious conversion, in which the significance of reality and the purpose of his life seemed to be suddenly made clear to him. We cannot tell how far these were heightened in the telling or in his own remembrance of them. Most real things were heightened or abased in Shelley's mind. But they shall be given in his own words.

In the Dedication to "The Revolt of Islam" he wrote:—

"I do remember well the hour which burst
My spirit's sleep: a fresh May-dawn it was,
When I walked forth upon the glittering grass,
And wept, I knew not why; until there rose
From the near schoolroom, voices, that, alas!
Were but one echo from a world of woes—
The harsh and grating strife of tyrants and of foes.

"And then I clasped my hands and looked around—
But none was near to mock my streaming eyes,
Which poured their warm drops on the sunny ground,
So, without shame, I spake:—'I will be wise,
And just, and free, and mild, if in me lies
Such power, for I grow weary to behold
The selfish and the strong still tyrannise
Without reproach or check.' I then controlled
My tears, my heart grew calm, and I was meek and cold."

In the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" there is this passage—

"While yet a boy I sought for ghosts, and sped
Through many a listening chamber, cave, and ruin,
And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing
Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.
I called on poisonous names with which our youth is fed;
I was not heard—I saw them not—
When musing deeply on the lot
Of life, at that sweet time when winds are wooing
All vital things that wake to bring
News of birds and blossoming,—
Sudden, thy shadow fell on me;
I shrieked and clasped my hands in ecstasy!

"I vowed that I would dedicate my powers
To thee and thine—have I not kept the vow?
With beating heart and streaming eyes, even now
I call the phantoms of a thousand hours
Each from his voiceless grave; they have in visioned bowers
Of studious zeal or love's delight
Outwatched with me the envious night—
They knew that never joy illumed my brow
Unlinked with hope that thou wouldst free
This world from its dark slavery,
That thou—O awful Loveliness,
Wouldst give whate'er these words cannot express."

Both of these passages are vague—they were written before Shelley learned to express himself precisely. But he describes in them the two great and lasting passions of his life as clearly as he was then able to see them himself. First there was the definite passion for reforming the world; and then, far stronger, there was the passion for a perfection that should give a simultaneous delight to all the parts of man's nature, moral, intellectual, and sensuous, in which all conflicts should be reconciled and "music and moonlight and feeling" should be one. The "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" was written when Shelley had become a Platonist; and we may well believe, with Professor Dowden, that it was Plato who purified his mind of those superstitions which wrought upon his nerves rather than upon his imagination. The romance of ideas took the place of the romance of fiends, and ghosts, and churchyards. All through his life he was troubled with nerves, and his passion for perfection when overstrained was apt to turn into terror. But he seldom indulged his terrors, or made literary capital of them, like Poe or Beddoes. There was nothing of the clever monkey in him. He was of the race of Apollo, a brother of Correggio and Mozart. The beauty to which he dedicated himself was indeed intellectual, to be courted by all the powers of the mind and apprehended by the exercise, not the sacrifice, of reason.

It is not to be supposed, in spite of what he says, that while yet a boy, and before he had read Plato, he had attained to that conception of Intellectual Beauty that possessed him in the maturity of his genius. But he was making himself capable of that conception; exercising his intellect as well as his senses; considering the problem, while he enjoyed the experience, of life; dreaming of ideas as well as of images, and always with some purpose, however vague, in his dreams.

Shelley began to write very early in life. It would be outside my purpose to give a list or account of all his early works. His biographers have taken pains to discover and relate all that there is to be known about them. They have no merit except fluency, and are not even imitations of good models.

In the early part of 1810 he induced a publisher to accept a romance called "*Zastrozzi*," and even, it is said, to give him £40 for it. It is a mere rigmarole of passionate words and phrases, much more difficult to read than it can have been to write. It has been said that falsity is the peculiar quality of romantic literature; and certainly the chief aim of the inferior romantic writer was to get away from all experience, to describe a world that never had been and never could be, all made up of scenery and arbitrary passions. This world, as represented in the works of Anne Radcliffe and Monk Lewis, delighted Shelley just because he had never known anything like it. Thus when he set to work to imitate these writers he fastened upon what was most unreal in them and reduced it, with unconscious irony, to an obvious absurdity. Anne Radcliffe had some imagination. Lewis had, at least, some mechanism, and could tell a coherent story even in the Ballad of Alonzo the Brave and the Fair Imogene. Shelley, at this time, had neither. It was enough for him that his characters should be convulsed with passion or melting with sensibility. What they did or why they did it mattered nothing, provided there was no routine in their lives and nothing familiar in their surroundings.

All the poets of that time were subject to the romantic weaknesses; but Shelley, who suffered from them most of all in his early and inferior writings, freed himself of them more than any in his greatest works. But he never consciously revolted against them or turned, like Byron, with a voluptuary's disgust, from sweets to savouries. He did not advance, like most men of genius, by means of reactions against his own ideas, but only by reaction against the world outside him. Experience produced no conflicts in his own mind, but only conflicts between his will and circumstance. He grew in power and even in sanity as he knew more clearly what he wanted, but not because the nature of his wants changed. Thus he seldom saw the absurdity of his past self or suffered a revulsion from his past tastes; never turned from an empty romanticism to an ugly realism. No doubt he saw that his early works were bad in execution, but he did not see that they were absurd in essence; and thus to the end of his days, when he was not writing like a great poet he was always apt to write like a young lady who had read too many romances.

Shelley had already contrived to fall in love when he wrote "Zastrozzi." He had known his cousin Harriet Grove from a child. She was beautiful, and about his own age. In the summer of 1810 she was staying at Field Place with her parents, and Shelley's passion for her was then plain to every one. Neither family was opposed to it, nor apparently was Harriet. They were never engaged, but corresponded together; and Harriet at first was not shocked by Shelley's opinions about religion, which he now took great pleasure in expressing, particularly in his correspondence with ladies. Having got his own idea of what the world ought to be almost as easily as a baby gets its appetite, he found that the Christian religion did not fall in with that idea, and determined to destroy it with a light heart. Just as evangelical lovers of a later generation wrote religious love-letters, so he wrote sceptical love-letters. It was the lover's instinct for possession that made him desire Harriet Grove to think as he thought, or rather to feel as he felt. And as he had a tenderness for many ladies, he tried to convert them all; and many of them enjoyed the process without taking it very seriously.

CHAPTER II

OXFORD

SHELLEY became an undergraduate of University College, Oxford, in the Michaelmas Term of 1810. He went there because it was his father's college. His father accompanied him and introduced him to Slatter, the bookseller, who had just set up in business. "My son has a literary turn," he said, "do, pray, indulge him in his printing freaks." Very soon after the beginning of term Shelley made the acquaintance of Thomas Jefferson Hogg, an undergraduate of the same college and his senior by a couple of terms. Hitherto we have had to depend upon scraps of information about Shelley. Now he becomes as clear to us as a character in a good novel. Hogg's Life of Shelley has many faults. It is not to be trusted on matters of fact, for Hogg was both unscrupulous and perverse. He wrote to enjoy himself and often did so at the reader's expense. He seems to have been a tiresome man, and he is often a tiresome writer. There is a story that in his later life when he was employed on the Municipal Corporation's Commission, his report was filled with lively complaints about the dinners which were served to him in different country inns. His Life of Shelley is full of irrelevances of the same kind, and yet, with Trelawney's Recollections, it is by far the most valuable book that has ever been written on Shelley. Hogg's sins, which are many, may be forgiven him, because he loved Shelley much, and because he had the wit to see through all Shelley's absurdities that he was a divine poet, though he had not yet written any divine poetry. He cannot have remembered his conversations with Shelley as exactly as he has reported them; but the speeches which he puts into

Shelley's mouth are so consistent with each other and with other accounts of Shelley's conversation that we may assume them to have the truth of a sketch from memory by a good painter, in which only irrelevant details are forgotten, and facts are emphasised, not perverted. Thanks to Hogg and Trelawney, we know Shelley better than any other of our great poets. We know his habits, his gestures, his tricks of speech, almost the sound of his voice. Hogg was a master of description, when he chose; and any one who writes a book about Shelley must be tempted to fill it with his descriptions. Since most of them have often been quoted I shall resist this temptation as much as I can. But where Hogg's words are better than any I can find, which must be very often, I shall use them as freely as if they were my own.

Shelley and Hogg first met at dinner in Hall. Shelley looked very young, even among the freshmen. His figure was slight and fragile, though his bones were large and strong. He was tall, but stooped. His clothes were well cut, but crumpled and unbrushed. His gestures were sometimes awkward and violent, but sometimes very graceful. His complexion was delicate, but sunburnt and freckled. His head and features were very small, his hair long and bushy, and he would rub it with his hands and pass his fingers through it in the agonies of anxious thought, so that it was always rough. His face had an air of profound religious veneration. His voice was very shrill, harsh, and discordant, a fact which other writers confirm, though some say that it was pleasant when not strained by excitement. Shelley and Hogg fell at once into a dispute about modern German and Italian literature, Shelley being for the Germans, Hogg for the Italians. They went to Hogg's room to continue the discussion, and when they got there Shelley said calmly that he knew no German or Italian. Hogg confessed that he was in the same case, and Shelley dismissed the subject with the remark that it was of no importance, as polite letters were but vain trifling. It was better to investigate things themselves through the physical sciences, and especially through chemistry. Then he went off to a lecture, but returned disappointed. "The man talked about stones," he said, "nothing but stones—and so drily. It was wonderfully tiresome—and stones are not interesting things in themselves."

The next day Hogg went to see Shelley in his rooms at two o'clock, where he found him under the impression that it was about ten or eleven. The rooms had been newly papered, painted, and furnished; but already they were in indescribable confusion. Books, boots, papers, philosophical instruments, clothes, pistols, crockery, ammunition, and phials innumerable, with money, stockings, prints, crucibles, bags, and boxes, were scattered everywhere. The tables and carpet were already stained with large spots of various hues. An electrical machine, an air-pump, a galvanic trough, a solar microscope and large glass jars and receivers were mixed up with the rest of the litter. A handsome razor had been used as a knife. Two piles of books supported a pair of tongs, and these upheld a glass retort above an Argand-lamp. Soon the liquor in the vessel boiled over with evil-smelling fumes. Shelley seized the glass and dashed it in pieces among the ashes under the grate. Then he showed Hogg his various instruments, and spoke of his design to make a combination of many electric kites that would draw down from the sky an immense volume of electricity, which, being directed to some point, would produce the most stupendous results. Soon after he forgot his contempt of polite letters and spoke of poetry with glowing zeal. Hogg and Shelley at once became close friends and spent a great part of the day together.

The teaching at Oxford was still almost as listless as Gibbon found it. An undergraduate might learn something if he chose, but no one tried to make him learn anything. Probably Shelley would have refused to learn anything under compulsion; but he had already a passion for knowledge which he communicated to Hogg, and they read much together from books of their own choice. Hogg did not catch Shelley's enthusiasm for science. Shelley's chemical experiments seemed to him to promise nothing but disaster. He had burnt a large hole in the carpet, in which he caught his foot whenever he crossed the room; and there was some danger that he would poison himself, since he would use his teacups as crucibles. Once when Hogg was taking tea by firelight, he heard a sound in the cup into which he was about to pour his tea. He looked into it and found a seven-shilling-piece partly dissolved in *aqua regia*. Shelley said that he had once swallowed a mineral poison at Eton, from the effects of which, he feared, he would never recover; but he was always fanciful about his health and apt to think that he suffered from romantic and deadly disorders. No doubt his strange habits of eating gave him indigestion; but he was often in good health soon after he had been despairing of his life.

About six in the evening Shelley usually became drowsy. He would then lie down stretched upon a rug before the fire, like a cat, with his little round head exposed to the fiercest heat. Sometimes Hogg interposed some kind of screen, but Shelley would generally roll in his sleep to the place where the heat was greatest. About ten he would suddenly start up, and, rubbing his eyes and passing his fingers swiftly through his hair, would begin to argue or recite verses with an energy and rapidity that were often painful to witness. The friends often went walks together, when Shelley would take a pair of pistols and fire at a mark, as he did in later years with Byron in Italy. But he was so careless with the pistols that Hogg would often secretly abstract the powder-flasks or the bullets before they started. Shelley liked to fling heavy stones into a pond, and when they splashed would speculate on the science of acoustics and the valuable discoveries that might be made about it. He was already fond of making paper-boats, but had not yet the skill in that art which he afterwards acquired. In the bleakest weather he would stay beside a pond until he had used up all the paper in his pockets, even to the fly-leaves of books and letters which he prized.

He was very happy at Oxford and wished he could stay there six or seven years, for he had so much to learn. He delighted in the privacy he could secure by "sporting his oak." "The oak is such a blessing," he exclaimed, clasping his hands, and repeated the remark slowly and in a solemn tone. "The oak goes far towards making this spot a paradise." He found the Dons, so far as he encountered them at all, to be very dull men. "A little man sent for me this morning and told me that I must read. 'You must read,' he said many times in his small voice. 'You must read *Prometheus Vinctus*, and Demosthenes *de Corona*, and Euclid.' 'Must I read Euclid?' I asked sorrowfully. 'Yes, certainly; and you must begin Aristotle's "Ethics."' This he repeated so often that I was quite tired; and at last I said; 'Must I care about Aristotle? What if I do not mind about Aristotle?' I then left him, for he seemed to be in great perplexity."

Hogg tells us, however, that he took to the scholastic logic very kindly, and seized its distinctions with his usual quickness. Indeed he had an athletic mind from the first, and enjoyed hard thinking as much as any metaphysician, provided it was about abstractions. There is a great deal of hard thinking in his most rapturous poetry, and more intellectual power in his images than in those of any other poet of his time. He was impatient of facts and details when they interfered with the process of his thought, but not because he could not grasp them. Some of his letters to Godwin prove that he understood business matters far better than that philosopher. A solicitor might have written them if he had had Shelley's powers of expression; and they should be read by those who suppose that only dull men can understand dull things. It was Shelley's weakness that too many things seemed dull to him, but that was not from laziness. At an age when many clever boys are intellectual sybarites, he was training his mind with hard exercise. That, no doubt, is one reason why he was a great and not a minor poet, in spite of his want of relish for the great and simple facts of life, for motherhood and childhood, seed-time and harvest, the labours of men, and their common joys and sorrows and passions. All these were no more to him than to a minor poet, who only cares for what he can turn to prettiness. But Shelley's imagination was always concerned with ideas, as the imagination of Shakespeare was concerned with men and women; and he turned philosophy, as Shakespeare turned stories, into poetry. There was always intellect in his emotions, and there is an intellectual structure in his most lyrical poetry. At this time his intellect and his emotions did not yet work together. His verse was as silly as a schoolgirl's, and he was satisfied with the cold philosophy of the eighteenth century. He read Hume's Essays, and could be tempted away from any pursuit by Locke's "Essay on the Human Understanding." Hogg thinks that he took up the sceptical philosophy because of the advantage it gave him in argument. No doubt he enjoyed the game for its own sake; but his destructive instinct was not quite aimless, like a puppy's. Like many men with a great power of faith, he had to make his own beliefs for himself; and the first step in this process was to rid his mind of the beliefs of others. The sceptical philosophers were for a time heroes and deliverers to him; just as the cold Brutus was a hero to the Jacobins. Their arguments were the weapons of freedom, and he trained himself to use them against what he took to be tyrant delusions. But he was not content with them for long. He could not live in a mere anarchy of disbelief; and the process of reconstruction soon began to succeed the process of destruction. He died before he had accomplished it, so that we cannot tell what his final beliefs would have been. But there is the effort to construct in much of his best poetry, the effort, not of a sentimentalist, but of a mind trained to distinguish truth from falsehood and determined to accept nothing but truth. This effort is what gives impulse to his verse, and a speed that compensates for its lack of weight. It is not still-water poetry, but has a swift current of ideas in which everything is swept along, and its movement keeps it keen and pure.

Yet even at this time, Hogg tells us, a listener to some of Shelley's glowing discourses would have hailed a young Platonist, "breathing forth the ideal Philosophy, and in his pursuit of the intellectual world entirely overlooking the material, or noticing it only to contemn it." His first knowledge of Plato he got from Dacier's translation of some of the Dialogues, and from an English version of that translation. He was never weary of listening to passages from the "Phædo," and he was vehemently excited by the doctrine that all our knowledge consists of reminiscences of what we knew in a former life. According to Hogg, he once questioned a baby in arms, as being likely to have clear memories of its last life, and insisted that it could speak of these things if it chose. Hogg could not interest him in jurisprudence, and his mind revolted from mathematics. He would not lay himself out to admire the buildings of Oxford, although he often betrayed pleasure in them when he happened to notice them. His taste in art was sentimental and capricious all his life; and, like a philosopher of the eighteenth century, he was apt to despise the great churches of the Middle Ages as relics of superstition. He had no historic sense about anything, least of all about art; and was no nearer to discovering the Middle Ages than Voltaire himself. To him they were scarcely even romantic. He had none of Blake's intuition of the significance of their art; not a glimmering of the fact that we have lost some secrets which they knew by instinct. For him between the end of the ancient world and the Renaissance there was a long period of darkness in which men only made mistakes.

To Hogg it seemed that in no one was the moral sense ever more completely developed than in Shelley; in no being was the perception of right and wrong more acute. It has been remarked, on the other hand, that he had no sense of guilt when he did wrong. The fact is that his mind was often in conflict with external things, never with itself. He never passed out of that first stage which Wordsworth describes in his "Ode to Duty"—

"When love is an unerring light,
And joy its own security."

For him joy was always the test, as it would be no doubt in heaven; and he saw no reason why we should not turn earth into heaven. But, since this is an imperfect world and we are all imperfect creatures, joy is not a safe test, even for men like Shelley who take no pleasure in grossness or meanness or cruelty. We have to train our wills by distinguishing between our pleasures. Shelley would not do this. He would not even judge his pleasures by results; for if the results were bad, it seemed to him to be the fault of circumstances. He did not understand that it is part of our moral problem to allow for the imperfection of our conditions.

There is no need to insist upon the fact that he had a good heart. A hundred stories prove it. Hogg speaks of his exquisite sensibility and his sympathy with all suffering. Nor was he a mere sentimentalist who satisfied his conscience with fine feelings. He would put himself to any trouble to help the distressed, and he took a noble joy in such trouble, a joy such as few of us can understand. Yet it might be said of him, as it was said of some one else, that he was born too good ever to become a saint. He had a facility in virtue like the facility of Raphael in art; and there were moral dangers in that facility.

For the Christmas vacation Shelley went to Field Place and Hogg to Buckinghamshire. Shelley wrote long letters to Hogg, and these reveal his state of mind more clearly even than Hogg's narrative. They are like the letters of a heroine of romance, and show Shelley in the full enjoyment of a number of romantic troubles. Not only was he in love, but a publisher, by name Stockdale, had warned his father when in London of his dangerous opinions and also of the evil influence of Hogg. Thereupon Timothy Shelley wrote a letter to his son which caused him the most exquisite apprehension. He was in the midst of treasons. "There is now need of all my art," he writes to Hogg; "I must resort to deception. I am surrounded, environed by dangers, to which compared the devils who besieged St. Antony were all inefficient." He burns with impatience for the moment of the dissolution of intolerance, and swears on the altar of perjured love to revenge himself on the hated cause of this effect. There lowers a terrific tempest, but he stands, as it were, on a Pharos, and smiles exultingly at the vain beating of the billows below. Here there is an allusion to another trouble. The parents of Harriet Grove had also become uneasy about his religious opinions; and Harriet herself, whether or no she sighed as a lover, consented as a daughter to their desire that she should go no further with him.

Yet he was not out of conceit with love, but wished Hogg to contract a passion for his sister Elizabeth, whom Hogg had never seen. He could not invite Hogg to Field Place, so he continued to write to him long, delirious, young-lady-like letters; and Hogg wrote to Elizabeth, whose intellect Shelley did not wish to awaken too powerfully, and to whom therefore he did not communicate all his own speculations. "The uncongenial jollities of Christmas" increased his sense of his own momentous woe. "When you are compelled to contribute to the merriment of others, when you are compelled to live under the severest of restraints, concealment of feelings pregnant enough in themselves, how terrible is your lot! I am learning abstraction, but I fear that my proficiency will be but trifling." It was not so much love itself as the circumstances of love that enthralled him; and it was, of course, only right and proper that they should be adverse. Nothing could be more in keeping with his ideas of himself and the world than that he should be rejected for his opinions and asked to desert his dearest friend. Hogg preached some kind of resignation to him, but he replied: "Considering matters in a philosophical light it evidently appears (if it is not treason to speak thus coolly on a subject so deliriously ecstatic) that we were not destined for misery. What then shall happiness arise from? Can we hesitate? Love, dear Love; and though every mental faculty is bewildered by this agony, which is in this life its too constant attendant, still is not that very agony to be preferred to the most thrilling sensualities of epicurism?"

These were the only alternatives that Shelley then found in life: Love, dear love, and the thrilling sensualities of epicurism. He writes as if life were an opera and he its prima donna. "I have wandered in the snow," he continues, "for I am cold, wet, and mad." It is all luxuriously unreal; but unfortunately reality was there all the while and preparing him for the blind disaster which involved another besides himself.

In his next letter, written the next day, he is in a philosophic mood. "The word 'God' has been and will continue to be the source of numberless errors until it is erased from the nomenclature of philosophy." But still, he thinks, the leaf of a tree and the meanest insects on which we trample are conclusive arguments that some vast intellect animates infinity. Like Hamlet he asks questions about suicide. "I slept with a loaded pistol and some poison last night, but did not die." "Can the dead feel; dawns any day-beam on the night of dissolution?" In another letter he talks again of Harriet Grove. "When in her natural character her spirits are good, her conversation animated, and she is almost in consequence ignorant of the refinements in love which can only be attained by solitary reflexion."

Shelley always kept this idea of love as a state of mind to be cultivated for its own sake and almost independent of its object. Love, as he conceived it, did not mean action, but ecstasy. It was like the religion of eremites, but unfortunately, not so free of material results as that religion. He could never understand why society has found it necessary to put restraints upon love. He thought of it as a condition of being at which every one should aim, and which should be renewed, whenever necessary, by fresh incitements. He forgot that these incitements are to action, and that if one generation lived for the sake of ecstasy, the next, produced by that ecstasy, would have to pay an exorbitant price for it. Meanwhile Harriet Grove was lost to him for ever. He had seen her, or tried to see her, but without result. He breaks into verse as much about stern warriors, and dread tyrants, and millions of blood-reeking victims, as about Harriet. Then he turns again to discussing ultimate reality. He defines soul as "the most supreme, superior, and distinguished abstract appendage to the nature of anything." But he seems to feel that something is wanting in the definition, for he says that his head is rather dizzy, "on account of not taking rest and a slight attack of typhus." He had spent most of the night pacing a churchyard.

Five days later he tells Hogg that Harriet Grove is married—"married to a clod of earth." It was a pity that Locksley Hall was not yet written for him to quote. "She will become as insensible herself," he cries. "All those fine capabilities will moulder!" But he does not tell this news until he has written at some length about Hogg's relations with Elizabeth; and having told it in a few words, he passes to other matters. He has attempted to enlighten his father, who listened to his arguments, agreed with him in some generalities, but when it came to particular applications of them, silenced him "with an equine argument, in effect with these words!—'I believe, because I do believe.'" "My mother," he says, "fancies I want to make a deistical coterie of all my little sisters: how laughable!" Then follows a poem by Elizabeth, just as good as Shelley's own poems of the same date. Hogg appears to have thought it strange that Shelley's poetry had so little to do with Harriet. So he explains: "If it neither has allusion to the sentiments which rationally might be supposed to possess me, or to those which my situation might awaken, it is another proof of that egotising variability, whilst I shudder to reflect how much I am in its power. To *you* I dare represent myself as I am! Wretched to the last degree."

Soon he begins to analyse his passion. "The question is, what do I love? It is almost unnecessary to answer. Do I love the person, the embodied identity, if I may be allowed the expression? No. I love what is superior, what is excellent, or what I conceive to be so." That was always the trouble with Shelley. He was apt to love people, not for themselves, but for perfections which he imagined in them; and so his love was precarious. In the case of women, unconscious desire, which always went to his head, disguised itself as a recognition of intellectual and moral perfections.

If we read these letters in a novel, we should protest against their impossibility. Fiction must always be less strange than reality, because it has to convince. As to reality, it matters only to ourselves whether we believe in it or not. But if a character like Shelley in his youth were represented in a good novel, he would not do any mischief or turn into a great poet. He would be there only for the fun to be got out of him and his opinions. He would be allowed to talk but not to act. The real Shelley always acted upon his opinions. Like love, he liked them for their own sake, and consequences were nothing to him. If he had not acted upon his opinions, he would have saved himself and others some great calamities; but he could never have been the poet he became. For his poetry was always the expression of his experience, the very music given off by his life; and if the life had been inconsistent in action or in thought, there would certainly have been a taint of insincerity in his poetry. It is splendid with his courage as well as with his genius. Indeed, courage was so much a part of his genius, that we admire some of his poems as if they were actions, and seem to see in them the daring flight of the poet himself as well as of his fancy. But he paid for that courage more dearly than many men pay for cowardly crimes; and he began to pay for it very early in life.

He returned to Oxford enraged with intolerance. This was the nearest he got to practical politics. The Duke of Norfolk, "The Jockey," who was a friend of the family and a chief of the Whigs, had told him that politics were the proper career for a young man of ability, and he went several times with his father to the House of Commons; but it did not stir his imagination. "What creatures did I see there!" he exclaimed. "What faces—what an expression of countenance!—what wretched beings." They were animals that he regarded with unmitigated disgust. He could not understand that the problem of politics is to govern by means of such animals as are willing to undertake the task of government. At no time of his life would he have seen the point of the Duke of Wellington's habitual question, "How is the King's Government to be carried on?" Instead of preparing himself to represent a pocket borough, he began to take an interest in oppressed individuals. There was a man named Browne who, rightly or wrongly, had been ordered to resign from the navy. He wrote a book about Sweden, and Shelley, believing he had been unjustly treated, agreed to purchase the copyright of it. Just before he was expelled from Oxford, he put his name to a bond for £800. So did the publisher, and since Shelley had no access to his father's fortune, the publisher had to pay. Leigh Hunt had lately been acquitted on a charge of seditious libel. The trial had been costly, and Shelley wrote to him to propose "a scheme of mutual safety and mutual indemnification for men of public spirit and principle." It is not known whether Hunt answered this letter. He certainly did not yet make Shelley's acquaintance.

Meanwhile the Dons probably got to know of Shelley's opinions, since he made no concealment of them. And if they did, they would consider him a dangerous revolutionary. It is hard for us now to realise how much revolutionary opinions were hated and feared in England for many years after the French Revolution; and nowhere were they hated and feared more than in the University of Oxford, intent upon maintaining its long and comfortable repose. Shelley must have been conspicuous anywhere, with his long hair, his strange habits, his beautiful countenance, and his high screaming voice. No doubt the Dons were curious about him from the first; and their curiosity would soon turn to anger and apprehension. They would be glad of a chance to make an example of him; and he soon gave them one. There has been some dispute about the origin of the famous pamphlet on "The Necessity of Atheism." Hogg tells us that Shelley had a habit of writing to people he had never seen, often to divines, enclosing a short abstract of the doctrines of Hume, and saying that it was a little tract which he had accidentally met with and which appeared to him quite unanswerable. He would give an assumed name, and an address in London. If he elicited an answer he would fall upon the unwary disputant and break his bones.

Hogg's account of these transactions is not quite clear. But it seems that Shelley began with written arguments, and gradually evolved a tract, which he printed and which ended with a Q.E.D. One of his correspondents seems to have supposed he was a doubting curate, and addressed him as the Reverend——. Early in his second term Shelley resolved to publish his tract under the title "The Necessity of Atheism." It was issued anonymously, and in the preface, Shelley called himself, "Thro' deficiency of proof an Atheist." He is said to have strewn the counter of Messrs. Slatter & Munday's shop with copies, and to have told the shopman to sell them as fast as he could at sixpence each. The sale was soon checked by a Don of New College, who, after looking at the tract, asked to see the principals, and induced them to burn the remaining copies. They sent for Shelley and remonstrated with him. He told them that he had sent a copy to all the bishops, to the Vice-Chancellor, and to all the heads of Colleges, with a letter in his own hand, signed Jeremiah Stukeley. It was some days before the pamphlet was brought home to him; but on the morning of Lady Day he rushed into his rooms, where Hogg was waiting for him, and cried, "I am expelled." Then he told Hogg that he had been sent for to the Common Room, where he found the master and some of the fellows of the college. The master produced a copy of the pamphlet, and asked if he had written it, speaking in "a rude, abrupt, and insolent tone." Shelley asked why he put the question. No answer was given; but the master loudly and angrily repeated, "Are you the author of this book?" "If I can judge of your manner," Shelley said, "you are resolved to punish me, if I should acknowledge that it is my work. If you can prove that it is, produce your evidence; it is neither just nor lawful to interrogate me in such a case and for such a purpose. Such proceedings would become a court of inquisitors, but not free men in a free country." "Do you choose to deny that this is your composition?" the master reiterated in the same rude and angry voice. Shelley finally refused to answer any questions, whereupon the master said furiously, "Then you are expelled; and I desire you will quit this college early to-morrow morning at the latest." One of the fellows took up two papers and handed one of them to Shelley. It was a sentence of expulsion drawn up in due form under the seal of the college. Having told his story, Shelley sat on the sofa repeating with convulsive vehemence the words, "Expelled, expelled." Thereupon Hogg wrote a short note to the master and fellows briefly expressing his sorrow at their treatment of Shelley, and his hope that they would reconsider their sentence. In an instant the porter summoned him before the master, who asked him whether he too had written the pamphlet. Hogg "submissively" pointed out to him the unfairness of the question, and refused to answer it. Thereupon the master told him to return and consider whether he would persist in his refusal. He had scarcely left the room when he was recalled. The master again asked him whether he admitted or denied having written the pamphlet. He again refused to answer, and the master cried, "Then you are expelled." A document like that given to Shelley was put in his hand, and he was commanded to quit the college the next day at an early hour.

After they had passed their sentence the Dons seem to have felt some compunction about it. But Hogg and Shelley gave no signs of the submission which, perhaps, was expected and hoped of them. As they were leaving the next morning, Hogg was told that if Shelley would ask permission of the master to stay for a short period, it would probably be granted. Both refused to ask any favour, and at eight o'clock in the morning they started in the coach for London.

It is not very wonderful in the general state of opinion at that time that Shelley should have been expelled for his pamphlet. Undergraduates were not sent to the University to write pamphlets on the necessity of atheism, and at that date they were all supposed to be members of the Church of England. It must be remembered, too, that atheism was associated in the minds of the orthodox with all the horrors of the French Revolution, and that there was a real fear that these horrors might be repeated in England if the contagion of the revolutionary doctrines spread. No doubt the Dons regarded the expulsion of Shelley as a sanitary measure, and included Hogg in it as an infected object. Their manner of proceeding, if it has not been misrepresented, was unnecessarily fierce. They might have attempted to reason with Shelley. They might have remembered that they had made no efforts to prevent him from falling into error. We may assume that they had not done their duty by him, and they ought to have asked themselves whether his offence was not the result of their neglect. The expulsion of Hogg was quite arbitrary. If they knew that Shelley had written the pamphlet, they had no evidence that Hogg had any hand in it, and it was clearly unjust to punish him for refusing to answer a question which they had no reason to put. No doubt they were severe because they were frightened. They wished to make an example, and, as usual in such cases, made a mistake.

If Hogg's story about the written acts of expulsion is true, they must have passed judgment and sentence before hearing the offenders; and they would not have done this unless they had been unfit to act as judges. But they were probably unfit for most of their duties; and since no one now would defend the state of the University as it then was, there is no need to be indignant at a particular act of some of its members. We can only regret that Shelley should have suffered by that act, for there can be no doubt that he did suffer by it. Though he was taught little at Oxford he might have learnt much, if he had stayed there for four years. He would have been forced into some acquaintance with normal young men, which would have been good both for him and for them. As it was, he knew but few normal people in the whole course of his life, and his mind suffered from his ignorance of them. He was confirmed in his natural tendency to rebel against all existing institutions. He felt thus early that the world was against him, and he determined to be against the world. He believed that he had been punished for doing what was right, and he regarded his punishment as a part of the general scheme of injustice against which it was his duty to make war.

Up to this time his family had been puzzled by him, but now they began to regard him as a black sheep; and the estrangement between him and them became serious. Worst of all, he was exposed to the circumstances which led to his first marriage, the chief disaster of his life.

CHAPTER III

SHELLEY'S FIRST MARRIAGE

IT is significant that Shelley should not have gone home in his trouble. Other boys in the same case might have avoided their parents from cowardice. But Shelley was afraid of no one, least of all his parents. He went to London, partly, no doubt, from a desire for adventure, partly because he would only have been wearied by his father's reproaches. He had already learnt to live a life of his own, in which his parents had no part. He was already estranged from them, not by a quarrel that might have been made up, but by a more fatal and permanent incompatibility and misunderstanding for which no one deserved much blame.

Their first night Shelley and Hogg put up at a coffee-house. The next day they looked for lodgings, and Shelley was difficult to please. One pleasant set he would not take because a man in the street cried "Mackerel," and "Mussels." He clapped his hands to his ears and rushed wildly out of doors. At another he fell in dudgeon with the maid's nose. At another he took umbrage at the voice of the mistress. At last they came to Poland Street. The name reminded Shelley of Thaddeus of Warsaw and Freedom. So he determined to lodge there. They found some rooms to let, one of them with a trellised paper, and vines with huge clusters of grapes, green and purple, on the trellis. Shelley was delighted. He went up to the wall and touched it. "We must stay here. Stay for ever!" he cried. Whenever a place took his fancy, he vowed to stay there for ever. A bedroom had the same paper, and Shelley took this. He asked whether grapes really grew in that manner anywhere, and said they would soon go and see them. In which case, Hogg pointed out, they could not stay in these lodgings for ever. When they were settled in the lodgings they took long walks together, and went to Wandsworth, where some of Shelley's sisters were at school. Hogg tells us how, when they came to the gate of the school, they saw a little girl, eight or ten years old, scampering about. Shelley screamed with delight, "Oh! there is little Hellen."

Meanwhile Shelley's father had to be reckoned with. He was determined that the friends should be parted. He would not have Hogg at Field Place, and wrote to him to that effect as soon as he heard of the expulsion. "The invitation, my son wrote me word, that you would accept to spend the Easter vacation at Field Place—I am sorry to say the late occurrence at University College must of necessity preclude me that pleasure, as I shall have to bear up against the affliction that such a business has occasioned." He seems to have been always incoherent both in his speech and his letters. He also wrote to Hogg's father about the two boys, saying, "I have endeavoured to part them by directing my son to return home, and also giving the same advice to your son; and backed by that opinion by men of rank and influence, therefore I would suggest to you to come to London and try our joint endeavours for that purpose." To this letter there is the following queer postscript:—

"Sir James Graham tells me there are several of the name, therefore into whosever's hands this comes, will have the goodness to find out the right person."

At the same time he wrote to Shelley, beginning, "My dear boy," and saying, "The disgrace which hangs over you is most serious, and though I have felt as a father, and sympathised in the misfortune which your criminal opinions and improper acts have begot, yet, you must know, that I have a duty to perform to my own character, as well as to your young brother and sisters. Above all, my feelings as a Christian require from me a decided and firm conduct towards you."

"If you shall require aid or assistance from me," he continues, "or any protection, you must pledge yourself to me—

"First. To go immediately to Field Place, and to abstain from all communication with Mr. Hogg for some considerable time.

"Second. That you shall place yourself under the care and society of such gentleman as I shall appoint, and attend to his instructions and directions he shall give."

And he concludes—

"These terms are so necessary to your well-being, and to the value which I cannot but entertain, that you may abandon your errors and present unjustifiable and wicked opinions, that I am resolved to withdraw myself from you, and leave you to the punishment and misery that belongs to the wicked pursuit of an opinion so diabolical and wicked as that which you have dared to declare, if you shall not accept my proposals."

This letter was evidently written by a man indignant and bewildered who did not mean unkindly. The demand that Shelley should break off all intercourse with Hogg was unwise in itself and expressed in terms calculated to provoke his refusal. He, romantic and high-spirited as he was, was sure to refuse to desert the friend who had suffered for him, and to regard the command that he should do so as an act of blind tyranny. He replied thus:—

"MY DEAR FATHER,—As you do me the honour of requesting to hear the determination of my mind as the basis of your future actions, I feel it my duty, although it gives me pain to wound 'the sense of duty to your own character, to that of your family, and your feelings as a Christian,' decidedly to refuse my assent to both the proposals in your letter, and to affirm that similar refusals will always be the fate of similar requests. With many thanks for your great kindness,—I remain your affectionate, dutiful son,

"PERCY B. SHELLEY"

If Timothy Shelley had been a wise man he would have gone to see his son and Hogg and tried to understand something of his son's state of mind, of Hogg's character, and of the relations between them, before making any proposals or demands. Letters are always a dangerous and imperfect means of communication between near relations in any delicate matter, and there was no reason why Timothy should write, as he had come to town and could see his son at any time. But he was not a wise man, and, even when he meant well, usually acted as mischievously as if he meant ill. He wrote again to Hogg's father urging him to get his "young man home." "They want to get into professions together. If possible they must be parted, for such monstrous opinions that occupy their thoughts are by no means in their favour."

"Paley's 'Natural Theology' I shall recommend my young man to read; it is extremely applicable. I shall read it with him. A father so employed must impress his mind more sensibly than a stranger."

"I understand you have more children. God grant they may turn out well, and this young man see his error."

Feeling that he must do something, yet not knowing what to do, Timothy went to see his solicitor. "I consider it right," he said, "to put my business into Mr. W.'s hands, to guard my honour and character in case of any prosecutions in the courts, and to direct my son to do what was right in the first instance, so he will now." He was surprised to find that Hogg's father was not much concerned about the affair. "Mr. Hogg," he exclaimed, "must be deceived. Indeed what right have these opinionated youngsters to do any such thing? Undutiful and disrespectful to a degree!"

Shelley had written to Hogg's father protesting that Hogg was not the original corrupter of his principles as Timothy Shelley supposed. Hogg knew nothing of this at the time, and was much touched when he discovered it years afterwards. Shelley, he says, had many underhand ways, but his secrets were hidden "through modesty, delicacy, generosity, refinement of soul, through a dislike to be praised and thanked for noble, disinterested, high-minded deeds." The particular occasion for this praise may seem slight. But there are many other proofs that it was deserved.

Shelley and his father were not yet utterly estranged. One Sunday Shelley took Hogg to dine with his father at an hotel. Hogg was kindly received; but presently Mr. Shelley began to talk in an odd, inconsequent manner; scolding, crying, swearing, and weeping. After dinner, when Shelley had gone out of the room on some errand, his father addressed Hogg thus :—

"You are a very different person, sir, from what I expected to find; you are a nice, moderate, reasonable, pleasant gentleman. Tell me what you think I ought to do with my poor boy." Hogg suggested marriage. But Timothy was sure that if he told Bysshe to marry a girl, he would refuse directly. Hogg agreed, but thought he might be brought into contact with some young lady, who would make him a suitable wife. They drank port, and Timothy Shelley began to talk loudly. He said he was highly respected in the House of Commons, and by the Speaker in particular, who told him that they could not get on without him. He was also greatly beloved in Sussex, and an excellent magistrate. He asserted that there was certainly a God. "You have no doubt on the subject, sir, have you?" he asked. Hogg had none; but Mr. Shelley persisted, "If you have, I can prove it to you in a moment." He drew out a sheet of paper and began to read. Shelley, who had returned, listened attentively, and after a while said, "I have heard this argument before." Hogg recognised the argument as Paley's, and Timothy Shelley acknowledged the fact. "I copied them out of Palley's book this morning myself," he said, "but Palley had them originally from me; almost everything in Palley's book he had from me." When they parted Timothy Shelley shook hands with Hogg, and said, "Tell me the truth, I am not such a bad fellow after all, am I."

Hogg never saw Timothy Shelley again, but this meeting gave him a kindly feeling for the old man. "If he had been taken the right way," Hogg remarks, "things might have gone better." Unfortunately neither father nor son could take the other the right way. The father continued to write aimless and scolding letters to the son. The son continued to regard the father as a grotesque nuisance, rather than as a human being. There was no established tenderness in his heart to soften passing exasperations. Thus they drifted more and more apart, Timothy never deciding what to do with Bysshe, and Bysshe making an obstinate resistance to all his proposals.

In April Hogg left London. He had made up his mind to be a barrister, and was to enter a conveyancer's chambers at York, where Shelley hoped to join him in June. Meanwhile Shelley stayed alone in his lodgings, "a bright-eyed, restless fox amid sour grapes." He was soon started upon a new and dangerous romance. On April 11, 1811, he writes to Hogg, "Miss Westbrook has this moment called on me with her sister." The younger Miss Westbrook, Harriet, was a fellow-pupil with Shelley's sisters at the school at Wandsworth. Her father, John Westbrook, had retired from keeping a coffee-house or tavern. At this time she was not yet sixteen. Hogg tells us that she was both beautiful and delightful; rosy, brown-haired, light-footed, sweet-voiced, and sweet-tempered. Shelley got to know her well in this way:—His father refused to give him any money until he made his submission. His sisters wished to help him, and sent him little gifts of money by Harriet, who often went home, and who therefore had more freedom. The eldest Miss Westbrook, Eliza, who was thirty years old, seems to have planned a match from the first with a natural ambition. Harriet gave an account of her first impressions of Shelley in a letter written after her marriage. When a child, she says, she admired the red-coats, though at the same time she "used to declare never to marry one. This was not so much on account of their vices as from the idea of their being killed. I thought, if I married any one, it should be a clergyman. Strange idea this, was it not? but being brought up in the Christian religion, 'twas this first gave rise to it. You may conceive with what horror I first heard that Percy was an Atheist; at least it was so given out at Clapham. . . . I was truly petrified. I wondered how he could live a moment professing such principles, and solemnly declared he should never change mine. I little thought of the rectitude of those principles, and when I wrote to him, I used to try to shake them, making sure that he was in the wrong, and that myself was right."

Thus they had a delightful subject of conversation. Harriet regarded Shelley, no doubt, as a fallen angel, and Shelley enjoyed nothing so much as undermining the faith of ladies. But in this case he had some misgivings. "It is perhaps scarcely doing her a kindness—it is perhaps inducing positive unhappiness—to point out to her a road which leads to perfection, the attainment of which, perhaps, does not repay the difficulties of progress." He does not speak of her like a lover: "My little friend Harriet W. is gone to her prison-house (his name for the school). . . . I went with her sister to Miss H.'s, and walked about Clapham Common with them for two hours. The youngest is a most amiable girl; the eldest is really conceited, but very condescending. I took the sacrament with her on Sunday." That he should have done this no doubt gave Eliza hopes, and she began to force the pace. Soon after Shelley writes that his poor little friend had been ill. "Her sister sent for me the other night. I found her on a couch, pale. Her father is civil to me, very strangely. The sister is too civil by half. She began talking about *l'Amour*. I philosophised, and the youngest said she had such a headache that she could not bear conversation. Her sister then went away, and I stayed till half-past twelve." Then follows an outburst against some one or something not named, but probably intolerance. "Yes! the fiend, the wretch, shall fall. Harriet will do for one of the crushers, and the eldest (Emily), with some taming, will do too." Her name was Eliza, and Shelley never succeeded in taming her. She contrived to marry him to Harriet, and she tried to manage their lives afterwards. There is no need to believe half what Hogg says against her; but it would have been better for Shelley and Harriet if she had never been born. In the same letter Shelley remarks: "Every one who aspires to perfection, may indulge a hope of arriving. Or rather every one (speaking of *men*) may hope to contribute to woman's arrival, which, in fact, is themselves advancing." Here we have the confusion of idealism and desire, which was always in Shelley's mind, most clearly and unconsciously expressed.

Men are to lead women on to perfection, and so to reach it themselves. It is an entrancing prospect. But meanwhile nature will turn these delicate ideals to her own material purposes; and provided these are accomplished and babies are born, she cares nothing what becomes of the ideals. Shelley says that his sister Elizabeth, still supposed to be the object of Hogg's passion, is tainted with intolerance, and he seems to fear that this will cause much sorrow to Hogg. There follows a poem about a lion and a lama. Shelley is the lama:—

"For in vain from the grasp of the bigot I flee,
The most tenderly loved of my soul
Are slaves to his hated control.
He pursues me, he blasts me! 'Tis in vain that I fly:
What remains, but to curse him;—to curse him and die?"

It was the comic opera rhythms of Pope's "Ode for St. Cecilia's Day," the violent jingle with which unlyrical poets insist that they are writing lyrical poetry. It was some years before Shelley began to make a music out of the sense of his words.

Writing a few days later he appears to be still thinking of Harriet Grove. "She talks of duty to her *father*. And this is your amiable religion." It was arranged after a good deal of negotiation that his father should allow him £200 a year, so that he seemed to himself to be rich. He was spending most of his time at the Westbrooks, and had been too hasty in criticising the character of Eliza.

On May 15 he wrote from Field Place. He had been reconciled to his father through the good services of his uncle, Captain Pilfold. He found that his sister Elizabeth had become, not only intolerant, but worldly and frivolous. No doubt the poor girl wished to enjoy life and not to be her brother's proselyte or the wife of his friend, whom she had never seen and took to be mad. But, as a matter of fact, Shelley had taken a violent prejudice against the institution of marriage and seems to have wished Elizabeth and Hogg to dispense with it. Elizabeth declined. "Matrimony," he told Hogg a month later, "is the subject of her constant and *pointed* panegyric."

But still Hogg must be in love with Elizabeth, and Shelley wished him to pay a secret visit to Field Place, where he should only walk out at midnight for fear of discovery. But from the window he would be able to look at Elizabeth. Hogg did not come, but appears to have maintained that Elizabeth was still perfection, which Shelley took for the infatuation of a lover.

Meanwhile he made an acquaintance of some importance to himself and still more to his biographers. Elizabeth Hitchener was a spinster of twenty-eight, and kept a girls' school at Hirstpierpoint. She was introduced to Shelley by Captain Pilfold while Shelley was on a visit to him at Cuckfield. It is said that her father was once a smuggler. At this time he kept a public-house. She appears to have been a good woman with opinions rather beyond her intelligence. There was something in her, we cannot tell what, that excited the enthusiasm of Shelley to a wonderful pitch. He was not more in love with her than with other women whose society he enjoyed. He appears in one of his letters to agree with her that she is not handsome, but tells her that she has "a tongue of energy and an eye of fire." It was natural that she, who probably lived rather a dull life, should take pleasure in the friendship of Shelley, who charmed every one not determined to dislike him, and whose genius, not yet even promised in his writings, must have shown itself in his looks and conversation. Her own part in their friendship was quite disinterested, if not wisely conducted. She made a fatal mistake when she went to live with Shelley and his wife; but she did not know the world as Madame Meck, the benefactress and correspondent of Tchaikovsky, knew it. That strange lady, who seems to have come out of one of Turgenief's novels, was determined that her romance should be only on paper. She would not have it whispered that she gave Tchaikovsky money because she loved him. Therefore she never saw him, and they talked to each other only in letters. Even so their friendship came to an end; but not so soon as the friendship of Miss Hitchener and

Shelley. Shelley was never aware of his own capacity for disillusionment. He thought he would enjoy talking to Miss Hitchener as much as writing to her, and that she would remain the "sister of his soul" when she shared his fireside. Luckily they corresponded for about a year before this happened, and his letters to her have lately been published.[1] The first of them was written on June 5, 1811, at Field Place; and they give us valuable information about the state of his mind during a momentous year of his life.

Mr. Dobell, in his introduction to them, says that they read like the novels, fashionable at that time, that were all written in letters. This is true, and no doubt Shelley felt as if he were living in a novel when he wrote them. He was the hero of his own romance and Miss Hitchener served for his confidante. He had an unlimited amount of sensibility for every experience, and when nothing happened he made portentous events out of nothing. He mystified the simplest facts; saw prodigies of virtue or vice in the most ordinary people; and generally exulted in the sense that he was making history. All this of course was the poetic energy still working blindly. He had not yet seen the true wonder and significance of life, and therefore he imagined a false wonder and significance in it.

He had only met Miss Hitchener once when he began to take an interest in her mind. In his first letter to her he expresses his usual wish to argue about religion. "If, secure of your own orthodoxy, you would attempt my proselytism, believe me, I should be most happy to subject myself to the danger." Truth is his God, he says, and his time is totally vacant for a polemical correspondence. He is an undivided votary of reason, holding that all poetical beauty ought to be subordinate to the inculcated moral, and that metaphorical language should be a pleasing vehicle for useful and momentous instruction. Christianity is passion and Deism reason. Therefore he is a deist. Certainly his Deism makes no appeal to the passions. His God is "merely a synonym for the existing power of existence." It would be dull work adoring such a deity.

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[1] By Mr. Bertram Dobell, who has also edited them.

The earlier letters are very ceremonious. One would suppose that Shelley, like his father, was a disciple of Chesterfield. "Do not speak any more of my time thrown away, or you will compel me, in my own defence, to say things which, although they could not share in the nature, would participate in the appearance, of a compliment." He admits that there is some delicacy in their relations. "I see the *impropriety* of dining with you—even of calling upon you. I shall not willingly, however, give up the friendship and correspondence of one whom, however superior to me, my arrogance calls an equal." Here we have a hint of the reason why he was so ceremonious with her. She was aware and spoke of the difference in their social positions. Shelley, as Hogg and Trelawny both insist, was a man of beautiful natural manners, a gentleman at heart; and he quieted her uneasiness with exquisite tact. "I am inferior to you," he wrote, "in everything but the equality of friendship." His expressions of admiration grow warmer as the correspondence proceeds. One would think, if it were any one but Shelley, that he must be in love. Indeed he dares to say that he loves her, but adds, "Nor do I risk the possibility of that degrading and contemptible interpretation of the sacred word; nor do I risk the supposition that the lump of organised matter which enshrines thy soul excites the love which that soul alone dare claim. Henceforth will I be yours—yours with truth, sincerity, and unreserve." Miss Hitchener knew, no doubt, that in using this dangerous language he was bidding defiance to the passions, for when he used it he was a bridegroom.

Already before he went to Field Place Hogg seems to have warned him against the designs of Eliza, for Shelley wrote to him in May 1811: "I cannot so deeply see into the influences of action as to come to this odd conclusion, which you observed in the matter of Miss Westbrook." Two months later he is still "more than usual calm" about Harriet. "Your jokes on Harriet Westbrook amuse me. It is a common error for people to fancy others in their own situation, but if I know anything about love, I am *not* in love." Unfortunately Harriet was. To put her in love was probably the easiest part of Eliza's task. There is no reason to suppose that Harriet was designing. Very likely Eliza told her that Shelley was dying for love of her. Certainly, if Eliza arranged matters, she did so skilfully. Shelley was always glad to believe that any one was persecuted, and to rush in as a deliverer. Thinking himself the victim of his own father's persecutions, he was ready to assume that all fathers were tyrants. The Miss Westbrooks told him that their father, of whose domestic discipline we cannot judge, was a tyrant. He wished Harriet to go back to school and she did not wish to go. She wrote to Shelley appealing for his help. He gives an account of the matter in a letter written to Miss Hitchener some months later. He was staying in Wales when Harriet first began to complain of her father's cruelty. "Suicide was her favourite theme, and her total uselessness urged as its defence. . . . Her letters became more and more gloomy. At length one assumed a tone of such despair as induced me to quit Wales precipitately. I arrived in London. I was shocked at observing the alteration of her looks. Little did I divine the cause. She had become violently attached to me, and feared that I should not return her attachment. Prejudice made the confession painful. It was impossible to avoid being much affected. I promised to unite my fate to hers. I stayed in London several days, during which she recovered her spirits. I had promised at her bidding to come again to London. They endeavoured to make her return to a school where malice and pride embittered every hour. She wrote to me. I came to London. I proposed marriage, for reasons which I have given you, and she complied. Blame me if thou wilt, dearest friend, for still thou art dearest to me; yet pity even the error if thou blamest me." This letter has a curious likeness to the letter which Tchaikovsky wrote to Madame Meck announcing his engagement, though it was not quite so prophetic of future unhappiness. Just after Harriet had confessed her love to him, Shelley wrote to Hogg: "How flattering a distinction! I am thinking of ten million things at once. What have I said? I declare quite ludicrous! I advised her to resist. She wrote to say that resistance was useless, but that she would fly with me, and threw herself on my protection. We shall have £200 a year. When we find it run short, we must live, I suppose, upon Love. Gratitude and admiration all demand that I should love her *for ever*." Soon afterwards he confessed to Hogg that he was embarrassed and melancholy. "I never was so fit for calm argument as now. This, I fear, more resembles excited action than inspired passion."

In contriving the marriage he had the help of his cousin Charles Grove. He arranged with Harriet that he should meet her at a coffee-house in Mount Street early in the morning about August 24. The exact date is uncertain. There he and his cousin had breakfast. Afterwards Harriet appeared, and they all three drove off to the inn from which the coach started. There they had to wait till evening; and then set off for Edinburgh, where they were married on August 28.

It was all fatally easy; and there is a curious irony in the fact that Shelley, who had often argued against marriage, never came so near to reducing it to an absurdity as when he, a boy of nineteen, found it possible to tie himself to a girl of sixteen, because he wished to preserve her from being sent back to school. But to the contention that marriage is made too easy, it may be answered that its consummation is even easier. That is the intention of nature, and in making marriage easy man has only submitted to it. But luckily there are few men who marry as Shelley did. Most Englishmen marry for love; most Frenchmen for convenience. Shelley did neither. He was against marriage altogether, and believing that marriage was not necessary to love, he naturally came to believe that love was not necessary to marriage. If he had loved Harriet he would, very likely, have made it a point of honour not to marry her. As it was, he thought it necessary to apologise for his inconsistency in submitting to the odious convention. In fact he trifled with marriage, and both he and Harriet had to pay the penalty.

The bride and bridegroom were at once in straits for money. Timothy Shelley wrote to Hogg's father saying that his son had withdrawn himself from his protection and set off for Scotland with a young female. He would give Shelley no money, and Mr. Westbrook followed suit. But Shelley was never much troubled by want of money. He got some from his good-natured uncle Pilfold, who said that it was all very well to be confoundedly angry, but that to stop the supplies was a great deal too bad. In the relations between Shelley and his wife there were at first no threats of future disaster. He seems to have been quite easy with her, if not in any ecstasy of happiness. In a few days Hogg joined them at Edinburgh, and saw Harriet for the first time. He says that she was "radiant with youth, health, and beauty." Shelley hailed him with delight and said they must never part again. He got a bedroom in the same house with them and had plenty of opportunity for observing Harriet. His account of her is very favourable. She was not stupid, or silly, or ill-tempered, or tactless, and she was well educated for her age and sex and social position.

"I have seldom, if ever," says Hogg, "met with a girl who had read so much as she had." Her favourite reading was moral tales, and she read aloud incessantly. She never ceased of her own accord, but only on some interruption. If any one entered the room she stopped, but began again the moment he left. She also read very well, with a clear, distinct, and agreeable voice. And it was as pleasant to look at her as to listen to her, for "she was always pretty, always bright, always blooming; smart, usually plain in her neatness; without a spot, without a wrinkle, not a hair out of place. The ladies said of her that she always looked as if she had just that moment stepped out of a glass case."

Shelley sometimes went to sleep while she read, and then she would call him an inattentive wretch. There is no doubt that she tried to be a good wife to him, and was one, though her housekeeping was not good. But he, who would make his dinner off a loaf of bread in the street, was not troubled by that. She adopted his ideas and even his ways of speech. If she liked a place she would say, like him, that she would stay there for ever. She took a ready interest in all that interested him, and there was nothing in her character to prevent him from growing to love her, as a man should love his wife; nor was there anything in his character to make him a very difficult husband. His temper was sweet. He was affectionate by nature. He had no vices; and a sensible woman might soon have learned to smile at his spiritual flirtations with other women.

One peculiarity Harriet had. Shelley, in a letter to Miss Hitchener, told how she had threatened to commit suicide. This was not the only time that she spoke of it. She would ask Hogg whether he had ever thought of destroying himself. "She often discoursed of her purpose of killing herself some day or other, and at great length, in a calm, resolute manner. . . . She spoke of self-murder serenely before strangers . . . and she looked so calm, so tranquil, so blooming, and so handsome, that the astonished guests smiled." There seems to be no doubt, then, that she had a suicidal tendency. There was some unsoundness in her mind that, if her life had been tranquil and prosperous, might have been always suppressed. But to her fortune was so unkind that there was scarcely need of a suicidal tendency to make her destroy herself.

Shelley, Harriet, and Hogg stayed five weeks in Edinburgh, and then they went to York. When they reached York Shelley felt that he must get some money somehow; so he determined to see his father. "I have written frequently to this thoughtless man," he told Miss Hitchener, "and am now determined to visit him, to try the force of truth."

On October 19 he was at Cuckfield staying with his uncle Pilfold, and there he saw Miss Hitchener. It is uncertain whether he saw his father, but he got no money from him, and even his mother was against him. While he was in Sussex two calamities happened. Eliza Westbrook joined Harriet at York, and Hogg attempted to seduce Harriet. Shelley was apt to imagine strange things and to magnify what he did not imagine; but his accounts of Hogg's treachery seem to prove that it was real.[1] He tells Miss Hitchener about it in a series of letters written after he had returned to York, and it is clear that he was much distressed, though he got some romantic excitement out of his distress. Harriet behaved very well throughout, and Shelley was pleased and touched by her behaviour. She had been heroic in her resistance to the "resistless and pathetic eloquence of Hogg, in whom, alas! virtue had lost one of its defenders and vice had gained a proselyte." Shelley pardoned Hogg "freely, fully, and completely," and there was no open rupture in their friendship; but Shelley had the sense to see that they could no longer live together.

Without saying anything to Hogg they left York suddenly for Keswick, a place chosen by Harriet and Eliza, who controlled Harriet's choice in most things. She had good reason to dislike Hogg and we need not believe all that he says against her; but it is clear that she was tiresome and unwise, and it was unfortunate that Shelley did not flee with his wife from her, as he had fled from Hogg. Hogg tells us that she was very plain, though Harriet thought her beautiful; her face scarred with smallpox and the colour of rice boiled in dirty water. Her eyes were dark but dull, her hair black and glossy, but coarse; and she spent a great part of the day brushing it. But this may have been an excuse to leave the bride and bridegroom together. Unfortunately when she was with them she did mischief. She had always managed Harriet and could not break herself off the habit, even if she tried. After the fashion of that time she assumed that Harriet's health was delicate, and began to talk of her nerves. Whenever it was proposed that anything should be done, she would cry, "Good gracious, what would Miss Warne say?" Miss Warne was a friend of Eliza's, and a kind of Mrs. Harris, though with a real existence, a silent authority always quoted in support of Eliza's wishes. Shelley at first tried to make the best of her. "She is," he told Miss Hitchener, "a woman rather superior to the generality. She is prejudiced; but her prejudices I do not consider unvanquishable. Indeed I have already conquered some of them." Yet he did not make it plain that he meant to be master in his own house, and that Eliza was only a visitor. He was always ready to impose on himself and others burdens too heavy to be borne, and he never knew how to get rid of them. It is quite wonderful that he should have escaped from Hogg; against Eliza he was helpless.

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[1] I have some doubts myself; but will not enlarge this book with a discussion on a matter of no great importance.

At Keswick Shelley took a small furnished house called Chesnut Cottage, with a view of Derwentwater and Bassenthwaite. He corresponded lavishly with Miss Hitchener and did not break off communication with Hogg. Hogg wrote asking to live with them and for "intimacy on the same happy terms as formerly." He seems to have had a real passion for Harriet, and perhaps Shelley's irregular ideas about marriage had turned his head and made him feel that adultery with Harriet would be different from adultery with any other man's wife. That is the worst of irregular ideas in a world that needs a great deal of regulating. They flatter the appetites of those who are more practical than visionary. From Shelley's correspondence with Miss Hitchener he seems to have been happy in his married life; but perhaps Harriet's society did not satisfy his mind, for he began to urge Miss Hitchener to come and live with them.

He still thinks marriage "an evil of immense and extensive magnitude"; but with unexpected sagacity he sees that a previous reformation in himself—and that a general and a great one—is requisite before it may be remedied. He wishes there was no difference of sex. "These detestable distinctions will surely be abolished in a future state of being." He conjectures that his friendship with Miss Hitchener may have begun in a former existence. "The creation of the soul at birth is a thing I do not like." He heard from Captain Pilfold that his father and grandfather intended to propose to him that, if he would consent to entail the estate on his eldest son, he should receive an allowance of £2000 a year. The very suggestion that for a bribe he would be prepared to "entail £120,000 of command over labour, of power to remit this, to employ it for beneficent purposes," on one whom he did not know, filled him with indignation. Those who cannot be bribed into an act of dishonesty are not rare; but Shelley was not asked to do anything that most honest men would consider wrong; and his refusal, at a time when he had very little money, proves that a scrupulous conscience was not a mere luxury to him. He did not indulge himself with abstractions so that he might escape concrete duties. Indeed, his abstract principles usually made life more difficult for him.

On the 13th December Shelley wrote to his father a conciliatory letter. He had the sincerest wish, he said, "of being again on those terms with you which existed some time since," though he could make no promise of concealing his opinions in political or religious matters.

Timothy Shelley answered in the same spirit. Meanwhile Mr. Westbrook agreed to allow Harriet £200 a year, and Timothy promised the same sum to Shelley. But he added that he did it to prevent him from cheating strangers. In spite of many attempts and negotiations, the father and son could not be friends. No doubt Timothy resented Shelley's airs of moral superiority and took this opportunity of letting him know that he was no better than he should be.

At Keswick Shelley made the acquaintance of Southey, whom he was anxious to know. Before he met him, he determined to reproach him for his tergiversation. Once bigotry, tyranny, and law had been hateful to him; but now the constitution of England was "inflated with the prostituted exertions of his pen." However, they got on well enough at their first meeting. Shelley found that Southey was still an advocate of liberty and equality, looking forward to "a state when all shall be perfected, and matter become subjected to the omnipotence of mind." But for the present he was an advocate for existing establishments and against Catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform. Shelley differed from him, of course, but found him a great man and a man of virtue, though without great reasoning powers. Southey took kindly to

Shelley. "There is a man at Keswick," he wrote to a friend, "who acts upon me as my own ghost would do. He is just what I was in 1794. . . . He has come to the fittest physician in the world. At present he has got to the Pantheistic stage of Philosophy; and in the course of a week, I expect he will be a Berkeleyan, for I have put him upon a course of Berkeley. . . . I tell him that all the difference between us is that he is nineteen, and I am thirty-seven."

It was a kind and wise letter; but that was not all the difference between them. Shelley was a born rebel, and Southey's rebellion had only been a growing pain. When Shelley failed to develop as he expected, he ceased to be wise and kind. But at present he acted according to his nature, and did all he could for Shelley, lending him books, inducing his landlord to reduce his rent, and even trying to reconcile him with his father. He told Shelley that he thought a revolution inevitable; which was one of his reasons for supporting things as they were. But of course the idea of approaching revolution only excited Shelley. "They may feed and may riot, and may sin to the last moment," he exclaimed. "The groans of the wretched may pass unheeded till the latest moment of this infamous revelry—till the storm burst upon them, and the oppressed take ruinous vengeance on the oppressors."

This is vague and tumid language; but indeed Shelley had reason for his indignation. The Prince Regent was spending money like water upon silly and vulgar extravagances, while the great mass of the people were in bitter poverty, and meanwhile every kind of reform was refused. Southey, like Wordsworth, had no kind of remedy to suggest. He had been so frightened by the French Revolution that he thought men could not improve their state by any kind of collective effort. The great mass of educated men in England at that time were of the same opinion. All collective effort was spent in carrying on the war with France. All enthusiasm was directed against Napoleon. The nation was struggling for its existence.

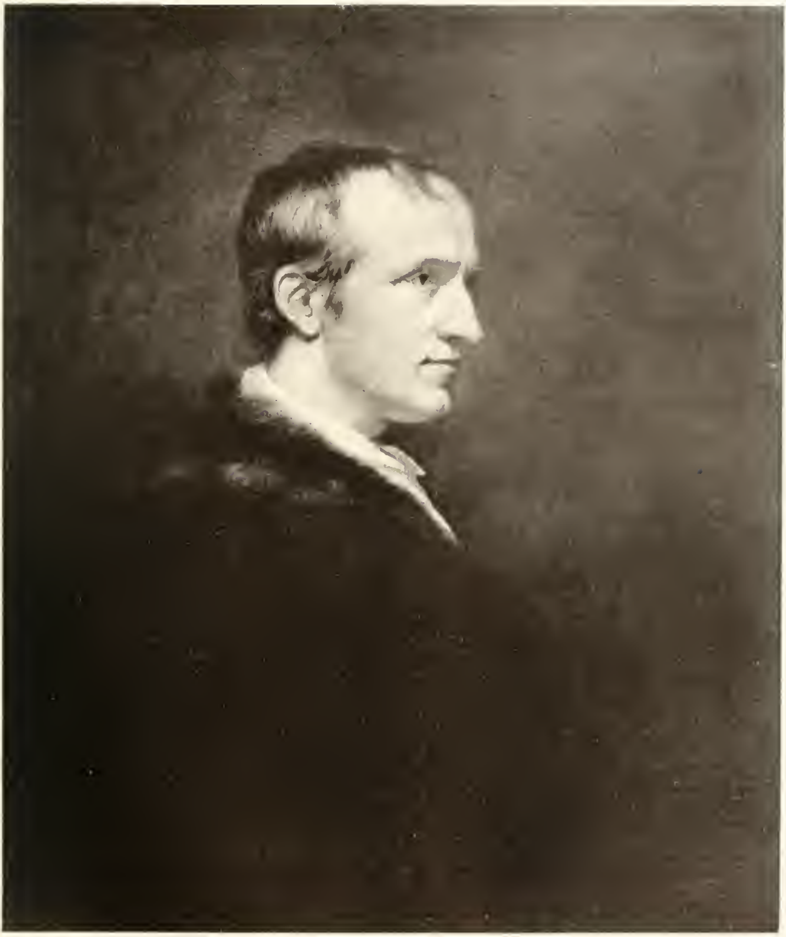
The hope of the world seemed to have been extinguished in tears and blood. We think of it now as an age of glory because of Trafalgar and Waterloo. But to all good men of the time, whether they thought like Southey or like Shelley, it seemed an age of darkness and fear; and, as in all such ages, good men were easily estranged from each other.

Southey held that "expediency ought to be made the ground of politics, but not of morals." Shelley urged that "the most fatal error that ever happened in the world was the separation of political and ethical science," that "politics were morals comprehensively enforced." But Southey had "a very happy knack, when truth goes against him, of saying, 'Oh, when you are as old as I am, you will think like me.'" Shelley, who could not understand the fears of Southey, was not sure that he was "*quite* uninfluenced by venality." "His writings solely support a numerous family. His sweet children are such amiable creatures that I almost forgive what I suspect. His wife is very stupid. Mrs. Coleridge is worse." Shelley did not meet Coleridge, and Coleridge afterwards regretted it, thinking he might have been of more use to Shelley than Southey was. Shelley was less and less able to put up with Southey's opinions. He is "corrupted by the world, contaminated by custom." He called George IV. the best monarch that ever adorned a throne. So his conversation lost its charm; "except it be the charm of horror at so hateful a prostitution of talents."

At the same time Shelley made the acquaintance, by letter, of a man who was to have a great influence upon his mind and fate. He had read Godwin's "Political Justice" at Eton, and it had come to be almost a Bible to him. William Godwin was a man of strange character. He had an honest intellect, but his mind was gradually corrupted by his incapacity to live upon his own income, and by incessant borrowing. He speculated with the abstract coldness, but without the wit, of a French philosopher of the eighteenth century. He was, indeed, the representative of French philosophy in England. His

"Political Justice" encouraged revolutionaries in England, but he was not a revolutionary himself. The French Revolution had frightened him, but it did not make his opinions reactionary. It only caused him to shrink from putting them in practice. In all things there was a fatal divorce between his principles and his conduct, which he tried to conceal from himself and others with an air of philosophic calm. It was the abstract logic of his works that delighted Shelley, who still thought like a philosopher of the eighteenth century. To Shelley he was the great prophet of Freedom, the man who supplied a rational basis for his own dreams.

Shelley had supposed that Godwin was dead. He now discovered that he was alive, and in January 1812 wrote to him a long and fervent letter. "I had enrolled your name," he wrote, "in the list of the honourable dead. I had felt regret that the glory of your being had passed from this earth of ours. It is not so. You still live, and I firmly believe are still planning the welfare of humankind." He himself, he says, is young and ardent in the cause of philanthropy and truth. His course has been short but eventful. He has seen much of human prejudice, suffered much from human persecution. "Is it strange that, defying prejudice as I have done, I should outstep the limits of custom's prescription, and endeavour to make my desire useful by a friendship with William Godwin?" Godwin answered, complaining that the generalising character of his letter rendered it deficient in interest, and that Shelley was not yet an individual to him. Shelley was naturally well pleased to give information about himself, and his next letter contained a short but romantic autobiography, beginning with his differences with his father. Their habits of thinking had never coincided. "Passive obedience was inculcated and enforced in my childhood. I was required to love because it was *my duty* to love; it is scarcely necessary to remark that coercion obviated its own intention. I was haunted with a passion for the wildest and most extravagant romances. Ancient books of chemistry and magic were perused with



WILLIAM GODWIN

FROM THE PAINTING BY JAMES NORTHCOTE, R.A., IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

an enthusiasm of wonder almost amounting to belief." He had published "Zastrozzi" and "St. Irvyne," he says, before the age of seventeen. He would send them to poor Godwin, though "quite uncharacteristic of me as I now am." "Political Justice" had cured him of romance. He rose from its perusal a wiser and a better man, finding that this universe of ours was enough to excite the interests of the heart, enough to employ the discussions of reason. No sooner had he formed his principles than he was anxious to disseminate their benefits. As a result he had been twice expelled from Eton, but recalled by the interference of his father. When he went to Oxford he found Oxonian society insipid. He could not descend to common life. "The sublime interest of poetry, lofty and exalted achievements, the proselytism of the world, the equalisation of its inhabitants, were to me the soul of my soul." Then he told of his expulsion from Oxford, and that he was heir by entail to an estate of £6000 a year; but that he regarded the law of primogeniture as an evil of primary magnitude. His father's notions of family honour were incoincident with his knowledge of public good. So his father had ever regarded him as a blot, a defilement of his honour. "He wished to induce me by poverty to accept of some commission in a distant regiment, and in the interim of my absence to prosecute the pamphlet ("On the Necessity of Atheism"), that a process of outlawry might make the estate, on his death, devolve to my younger brother."

Two statements in this letter, one trivial the other more important, are certainly untrue. Shelley did not publish his two romances before he was seventeen, nor was he either once or twice expelled from Eton. At least there is no evidence in support of this statement. We cannot tell what grounds he had for the story of his father's design to get him outlawed. His father may have uttered vague threats, and Shelley may have connected these with his desire to break the entail. He was apt to make lurid romances out of nothing, especially when he could imagine his father the villain of them; and in this letter he was obviously trying to give as romantic an account of himself as he could. He never was truthful about matters of fact; but his aim, in all his fictions, whether they were conscious or unconscious, was always romantic, never vindictive or cowardly.

Godwin replied, advising him to make it up with his father, and to learn more before he set out to reform the world. This produced another long letter from Shelley full of delight that Godwin should be his friend and adviser, the moderator of his enthusiasm, the personal exciter and strengthener of his virtuous habits. He had known no tutor or adviser (not excepting his father) from whose lessons and suggestions he had not recoiled with disgust. He was not angry with his father, but desired a reconciliation, though not at the price of a renunciation of his opinions. Yet he had never loved his father—"it was not from hardness of heart, for I have loved and do love warmly."

Godwin had told him that, being yet a scholar, he ought to have no intolerable itch to become a teacher. Shelley replied humbly to this, "I hope in the course of our communication to acquire that sobriety of spirit which is the characteristic of true heroism." He would not again crudely obtrude the question of atheism on the world. But he wished at the same time to improve his own powers and to diffuse true and virtuous principles. In fact, not even Godwin could induce him to give up writing and publishing what he wrote. At the end of this letter which is dated January 16, 1812, he says that he is setting off for Dublin in a few days. There were several reasons for this change. In the first place, he was getting tired of Keswick. "Though the face of the country is lovely," he wrote to Miss Hitchener, "the *people* are detestable. The manufacturers, with their contamination, have crept into the peaceful vale, and deformed the loveliness of nature with human taint. The debauched servants of the great families who resort contribute to the total extinction of morality." Soon after he says, "We have now serious thoughts of immediately going to Ireland. . . . I am now writing an *address* to the poor Irish Catholics." It was to be cheaply printed in large sheets to be stuck about the walls of Dublin. So he was drawn to Ireland by that desire to reform the world against which Godwin had so vainly warned him.

Miss Hitchener must come with them. "If two hearts, panting for the happiness and liberty of mankind, were joined by union and proximity, as they are by friendship and sympathy," what might they not do. Harriet and Eliza longed to see her. But had she any idea of *marrying?* He would answer the question for her. She had not. Therefore she must come to live with them; for Harriet was above the meanness of jealousy. He enclosed a poem about the devil, and insisted that he believed in the immortality of the soul, though he could not tell her why in a letter, at least not clearly. He would get Godwin's opinion on the question as soon as he could. Harriet also wrote to Miss Hitchener, like a good girl, echoing Shelley's wish that she would come with them and also his sentiments. "How do I every day hate the foolish customs of society that shackle all our projects!" In the same letter she alludes to a mysterious attack that was said to have been made on Shelley on January 19. The story is that Shelley, hearing a noise about seven o'clock in the evening, went to his cottage door, and on opening it received a blow which struck him senseless.[1] The assailants fled and were never found. People in the place thought Shelley had imagined the assault. He himself made light of it in writing to Miss Hitchener. No doubt it was either a symptom or a cause of his desire to leave Keswick. Miss Hitchener would not come with them to Ireland, because she had to look after some American pupils. But Shelley meant to go to Wales after Ireland, and there he intended she should join them. "I shall try to domesticate in some antique feudal castle whose mouldering turrets are fit emblems of decaying inequality and oppression. . . . Perhaps you will bring the dear little Americans and my mother, Mrs. Adams (a lady whom Miss Hitchener called the mother of her soul and in whose maternity Shelley was therefore determined to share). Perhaps Godwin will come. I shall try to induce him."

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[1] This account of the matter was got by Professor Dowden from the Cumberland *Pacquet* of January 28, 1812.

Miss Hitchener was afraid of scandal; but, said Shelley, "let us attempt to form this Paradise and defy the destroyers. Calm, consistent reasoning will defeat the most terrible." And then they would inspire each other. "How consummate *then* might not our publications be." Harriet also wrote again, just like Shelley, but a very pretty letter. "I know I am much younger than yourself and that your judgment is much superior to mine. . . . Yet if you knew how ardent we are to have you near us I am sure you would comply." Like a good wife Harriet was ready to outdo Shelley himself in her ardour for Ireland. "I am Irish; I claim kinship with them. I have done with the English. I have witnessed too much of John Bull, and I am ashamed of him." Then she goes on to speak of Eliza. "I did think, before I was acquainted with you (she had never seen Miss Hitchener), that she was the best and most superior woman in the world." She ends: "There seems to be sad work in Ireland; but I hope Percy will escape all prosecutions."

There was sad work. The state of Ireland was miserable and bewildered. The Irish were disappointed in their hopes of Catholic emancipation after the Union, and the Government was trying, rather feebly, to repress their discontent. Shelley went to Ireland with the intention of preaching a vague gospel of virtue, wisdom, tolerance, and benevolence to a wretched, ignorant, distracted people. Before he started Godwin reproved him for his presumption. He told Shelley that early authorship was detrimental to the cause of general happiness. Shelley bestowed deep and disinterested thought on the subject, but could not agree with him. Therefore he had prepared an address to the Catholics of Ireland, "consisting of the benevolent and tolerant deductions of philosophy reduced to the simplest language and attempting to convey to the vulgar mind sentiments of universal philanthropy."

At the beginning of February 1812, Shelley, Harriet, and Eliza left Keswick for Dublin. They had a rough journey, and reached Dublin on February 12. On the way, at Whitehaven, Shelley found time to write a long letter to Miss Hitchener. He ended by asking what she was to be called when she came to live with them. "Eliza's name is 'Eliza,' and 'Miss Hitchener' is too long, too broad, and too deep." Miss Hitchener answered that she would like to be called Portia, and Harriet gently protested. "I do not like the name you have taken: but mind, only the name. You are fully worthy of it; but being a name so much out of the common way, it excites so much curiosity in the mind of the hearer. This is my only reason for not liking it. I had thought it would have been one more common and more pleasing to the ear." They took rooms in Sackville Street, over a draper's shop. Two days after their arrival Shelley wrote a long letter to Miss Hitchener, in which his ardour carried him from prose into blank verse. Here is a passage on Time: "Proceed, thou giant, conquering and to conquer! March on thy lonely way! The nations fall beneath thy noiseless footstep: pyramids, that for millenniums have defied the blast and laughed at lightnings, thou dost crush to nought," &c. The news of the establishment of a republic in Mexico incites him to undisguised verse:—

"Cotopaxi,[1] let the sound
  Through thy sister mountains ring,
Till each valley smile around
  At the blissful welcoming."

Though his words were fierce he still loved the cold abstractions of the eighteenth century, for they were agreeable to the vagueness of his thought.

Before Shelley's address was finished he was writing another to follow it, "with downright proposals for instituting associations for bettering the conditions of humankind. . . . Oh, that I may be a successful apostle of this true religion, the religion of philanthropy! At all events I will have a debating society and see what will grow out of that. This is the crisis for the attempt." Eliza was set to collect passages from the works of Tom Paine. These were to be published but were not likely to excite the enthusiasm of Irish Catholics.

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[1] He credits Cotopaxi with an ardour as disinterested as his own. A volcano in Ecuador was not likely to take much interest in a revolution in Mexico.

Eliza also "keeps our common stock of money, for safety, in some hole or corner of her dress, but we are not all dependent on her though she gives it out as we want it." But money is of no account. "Let us," he cries, "mingle our identities inseparably, and burst upon tyrants with the accumulated impetuosity of our acquirements and resolutions."

The address burst upon them on February 25. Shelley's effort to write in the simplest language improved his style, but his matter was not calculated to please or interest the Irish. "I seek your confidence," he says, "not that I may betray it, but that I may teach you to be happy, and wise, and good." He then warns them against priestcraft. They are to take care that, whilst one tyranny is destroyed, another more fierce and terrible does not spring up. "Take care of smooth-faced impostors, who talk indeed of freedom, but who will cheat you into slavery." He explains one cause of Irish poverty very clearly. "The union of England with Ireland has withdrawn the Protestant aristocracy and gentry from their native country, and with them their friends and connections. Their resources are taken from this country although they are dissipated in another." He then goes on to speak of methods. He warns the Irish against violence: "The way to liberty and happiness is never to transgress the rules of virtue and justice." "Be calm, mild, deliberate, patient." "You are not all wise and good. You may be at some time, and then Ireland will be an earthly paradise." Meanwhile they should rely, not on violent and secret associations, but on the English who love Ireland and freedom. The address is long, and concludes with the statement that the writer has come to Ireland "to spare no pains where expenditure may purchase your real benefit." Writing to Godwin Shelley explained that he used expenditure here in a moral sense. Some Irishmen, it is said, preferred to take the word in its ordinary meaning.

Writing to Miss Hitchener on February 27, Shelley said that 400 copies of the address had been distributed and had created a sensation of wonder in Dublin. "I stand at the balcony of our window and watch till I see a man *who looks likely:* I throw a book to him." Harriet adds: "I'm sure you would laugh were you to see us give the pamphlets. We throw them out of window and give them to men that we pass in the streets. For myself I am ready to die of laughter when it is done, and Percy looks so grave. Yesterday we put one into a woman's hood of a cloak. She knew nothing of it and we passed her. I could hardly get on, my muscles were so irritated."

Shelley had in his mind a plan for proselytising the young men at Dublin College. "Those who are not entirely given up to the grossness of dissipation are perhaps reclaimable." Godwin had given him a letter of introduction to Curran, but they had not met yet. Shelley did not like him for accepting the office of Master of the Rolls. He soon fell out of conceit with the Irish. "Good principles are scarce here," he complained. "The public papers are either oppositionist or ministerial. One is as contemptible and narrow as the other. I wish I could change this. I, of course, am hated by both these parties. . . . I have met with some waverers between Christianity and Deism. I shall attempt to make them reject all the bad and take all the good of the Jewish books. I have often thought that the moral sayings of Jesus Christ might be very useful, if selected from the mystery and immorality which surrounds them; it is a little work I have in contemplation." It is clear that he had forgotten all Godwin's advice. But as we read these pompous and complacent sentences we must remember that he was only nineteen; and it is well at that age to have the ambition to reform the world.

On February 28 he went to a meeting on Catholic emancipation and spoke for more than an hour after O'Connell. He was cheered when he said that he blushed for England, but hissed when he spoke of religion, though he did so in terms of respect.

The proposals for an association of philanthropists to accomplish the regeneration of Ireland appeared on March 2. Its immediate objects were stated to be Catholic Emancipation and the Repeal of the Union. Shelley did not think that Catholic Emancipation would do much for the liberty and happiness of the Irish, but he was inimical to all disqualifications for opinion. Also he hears the teeth of the palsied beldame, Superstition, chatter, which naturally gives him pleasure. Most of the proposals are very vague. They contain many lofty sentiments, but do not urge the doing of anything in particular. The members of the association are to employ the same means that he employs, and he would like those who are favourably inclined towards his project to communicate personally with him.

But he was growing more and more discouraged, and longed to be with Miss Hitchener and Peace. His association proceeds but slowly, and he fears it will not be established. Prejudices are so violent that more hate him as a freethinker than love him as a votary of freedom.

On March 4 Godwin wrote him a long letter protesting against his design of forming an association. "If I may be allowed to understand my book on 'Political Justice,' its pervading principle is that association is a most ill-chosen and ill-qualified mode of endeavouring to promote the political happiness of mankind." "Does it not follow that you have read my writings very slightly?"

Godwin then states very clearly the chief defect in Shelley's understanding, a defect which he got from the cold yet daring philosophers of the eighteenth century. "One principle, that I believe is wanting in you, and all our too fervent and impetuous reformers, is the thought that almost every institution or form of society is good in its place, and in the period of time to which it belongs." Shelley had no historical sense. He never understood that all the institutions which he hated had been made by men of the same nature as those whom he wished to deliver from such institutions. He thought of them as imposed upon mankind by some inexplicable external tyranny, of which bad men were the willing slaves and good men the unwilling victims. Men had only, he thought, to rebel against that tyranny and everything would go well at once. Having no distrust of his own passions, he did not understand that there were tyrannic passions in mankind, against which they must protect themselves with laws and institutions imperfect as their own nature. Nor did he see that, if all laws and institutions were swept away, new ones, clumsily made in all the haste and panic of emergency, would immediately take their place. Thus he desired to rob the Irish of their religion, because it was not his. While they were struggling against immediate and practical iniquities which made it almost impossible for the great mass of them to live like men, he exhorted them to be philosophers and revolt against the tyranny of false ideas. It is not wonderful that they paid no heed to him.

Godwin also told him that he did well to write much, but not to publish yet. "It is beautiful to correct our errors, to make each day a comment on the last, and to grow perpetually wiser; but all this need not be done before the public." The letter ended with a pleasant rebuke. "To descend from great things to small, I can perceive that you are already infected with the air of that country. Your letter with its enclosures cost me, by post, £1. 1s. 8d.; and you say that you send it in this way to save expense."

Shelley replied with meek impenitence. He knows that he is vain; but he believes that the line of conduct he is now pursuing will produce a preponderance of good. He has not read Godwin's writings slightly; but "Political Justice" had been published in 1793, and men had not ceased to fight, nor had vice or misery vanished from the earth. From this he infers that the discussion, reading, inquiry, and perpetual communication, which Godwin recommended in that book, will not avail to improve the lot of mankind. Hence his project for a Philanthropic Association. His address was designed to operate on the Irish mob, and to awaken a moral sense in them. "Might not an unadorned display of moral truth, suited to their comprehensions, produce the best effects."

Shelley was very like the excellent young men who nowadays go to the slums with the design of teaching their inhabitants how to live, and without asking themselves how they would live if they had been born and bred in slums. A noble clergyman of our own time used to tell such young men that they should come not to teach, but to learn; to improve, not others, but themselves. He, no doubt, would have preached the same humility to Shelley. But probably he would have loved him, in spite of his talk of awakening a moral sense in people of whose temptations he could know nothing, just as Christ loved the young man with great possessions. Shelley had his great possessions of the mind, and the hardest task for him would have been to count these as nothing, to rid himself of all spiritual and intellectual arrogance. Godwin, with all his sagacity, could not teach him to do this; for he was himself arrogant and cold, and could only appeal to that reason which, in Shelley, was the very source of pride. If Shelley at this time had fallen under the dominion of one who could make humility seem beautiful to him, he might have escaped the disaster that lay in wait for him and for his wife. It was pride that made him sure of the perfection of all those whom he chose to admire; and pride that made him see no good in them when his admiration ceased. He loved people, not for themselves, but for what he thought of them. He was like those artists who paint the ideal of their own imaginations, not the excellence and promise of real things. There was something insipid in what he admired and thought that he found even in real people, for he was not aware of their real qualities; and these, when they forced themselves upon his notice, affronted his dreams, and therefore seemed to him devilish instead of human.

We can see clearly enough now that all this time he was advancing towards disaster, and his very courage and consistency made disaster of some kind more certain. Not only did he ignore realities, but he acted as if they were not, and as if his own dreams were true. A man in this state of mind could learn nothing except from fierce conflict with realities, and the painful defeat that must ensue. The only question was, what should be the cause of that conflict.

Godwin feared that Shelley would bring calamities on himself and the Irish people. "Shelley," he wrote, "you are preparing a scene of blood!" But Godwin took this adventure far too seriously. Shelley talked to the Irish about things of which they knew and cared nothing, and they paid no heed to him. It was not likely that the arguments of an English boy would cause them to desert their national and persecuted faith. "I do not like Lord Fingal, or *any* of the Catholic aristocracy," Shelley wrote to Miss Hitchener. Nor did he like Curran when he came to know him; for Curran, when he should have been talking of reason and tolerance and freedom, only made jokes. "I may not possess sufficient taste to relish humour," Shelley wrote to Godwin, "or his incessant comicality may weary that which I possess." He never had a sense of humour, for that is the result of a joyful sense of the imperfection of this life; and Shelley to the end of his days remained impatient of everything imperfect. It was in Ireland that he first became a vegetarian; and that, together with an Irish servant he took back with him across the Channel, was the chief result of his visit.

He, Harriet, and Eliza left Dublin for Holyhead on April 4, 1812. On April 18, he wrote to Miss Hitchener from Rhayader in Radnorshire, where he had stayed the summer before. He was going to take a house with two hundred acres of arable land, and hoped to pay the rent by farming. "The end of June," he said, "is the time fixed for our meeting. Oh that the hours which divide that time from the present may roll fast!" He proposes that she should bring her father with her, and that he should manage the farm. It appears that about this time some scandal was talked about Shelley and Miss Hitchener to whom Mrs. Pilfold had mentioned it. "It raises a smile of bitterness at the world," he wrote to his Portia, "when I think on the *only possible* report which Mrs. Pilfold can have treated you with. What will she have recourse to next. *I* unfaithful to my Harriet! *You* a female Hogg! Common sense should laugh such an idea to scorn, if indignation would wait till it could be looked upon!"

Harriet was so unwell that a doctor was sent for from forty miles away. Shelley consoled himself during her illness with this curious reflection. "How many weeks has not this frame tossed on a bed of bodily pain, with a mind scarcely less diseased than the body." "I have much to talk to you of," he says to Miss Hitchener, "innate passions, God, Christianity, &c., when we meet. Would not, 'co-existent with our organisation,' be a more correct phrase for passions than 'innate'? I think I can prove to you that *our* God is the same." Alas, passions do not become less dangerous, even if we say that they are co-existent with our organisation instead of innate.

They were not to meet at Rhayader, for Shelley could not find the required security for the purchase money of the estate. He wrote there a poem of some length and more merit, perhaps, than any of his earlier verses, in which he exulted in his present happiness compared with his grief of a year ago.

"How do I feel my happiness?
I cannot tell, but they may guess
Whose every gloomy feeling gone,
Friendship and passion feel alone."

The construction here is confused, but the language is simple; and the metre is already handled with some promise of his future triumphs in it. But the poem, like another written a few months later, is mainly interesting because it proves him to have been still quite happy with Harriet and indeed thoroughly in love with her.

They went from Rhayader to Lynmouth, then perhaps the most beautiful place in England. There they took a cottage, and there, at last, in July 1812, Miss Hitchener came to live with them; but they called her Bessie, not Portia.

With her Shelley used to set little watertight boxes, containing his "Declaration of Rights," sailing in the sea. The declaration contained his political creed in thirty-one articles. He also attached it to fire balloons, which he set off in the evening. Thus he was able to give simultaneous pleasure both to the child and the revolutionary in himself. At Lynmouth also he was writing "Queen Mab," the first of his works in which there is any promise of a great poet. "The Past, the Present, and the Future," he wrote, "are the grand and comprehensive topics of this poem. I have not yet half exhausted the second of them."

In August Shelley's Irish servant, Dan Healey, was arrested for posting the Declaration of Rights about Barnstaple, and was fined £200. Shelley could not raise the money, and in default of payment Healey was sent to prison for six months. The Mayor of Barnstaple wrote to the Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth, about Shelley, and it was decided that he should be watched but not prosecuted. Shelley, having made what provision he could for his servant in gaol, left Lynmouth suddenly and went to Tremadoc on the coast of Carnarvonshire. After he had gone, the unfortunate Godwin, who had been pressed to pay him a visit, took him at his word and after a slow and unpleasant journey from Bristol by sea, arrived at Lynmouth to find Shelley and his family departed. All his life he had this habit of making sudden flights from places where he had vowed to live for ever. When he found another eternal abode his books, Hogg tells us, were at once despatched thither, "but with so wild a precipitance and such headlong hurry that ancients and moderns alike missed their way." Tremadoc was a little town on land that had been lately reclaimed from the sea by a Mr. Madock and took its name from him. He had the design to recover more land by building a great embankment nearly a mile long across the estuary which there runs in from the coast. This was almost finished when Shelley came there in September 1812, but there were engineering difficulties over the last piece, and Mr. Madock was running short of money. Shelley took his house, Tanyrallt, which was beautifully placed above the valley. "The rent," he said, "is large; but it is an object with us that they allow it to remain unpaid till I am of age." The embankment, as a piece of scientific philanthropy, roused him to enthusiasm. He tried to raise money in the neighbourhood, promised £100 himself, and early in October went with his three companions to London mainly with the object of raising more money. In London he met Godwin for the first time, and saw much of him. It is not known whether he also saw Godwin's daughter, Mary Wollstonecraft. Hogg was now in London and the pupil of a Special Pleader in the Middle Temple. He had known nothing of Shelley's movements, and it was a complete surprise to him when Shelley rushed into his room one evening early in November. He looked "as he had always looked, wild, intellectual, unearthly; like a spirit that had just descended from the sky; like a demon risen at that moment out of the ground." The next day Hogg went to see them all at their hotel. Shelley did not say a word about Ireland, but was full of the Tremadoc project. He had no success with it. "In Sussex," he wrote to Madock's agent, "I meet with no encouragement. They are a parcel of cold, selfish, calculating animals, who seem to have no other aim or business on earth but to eat, drink, and sleep; but in the meanwhile my fervid hopes, my ardent desires, my unremitting personal exertions (so far as my health will allow) are all engaged in that cause, which I will desert but with my life." One cannot see why the Sussex people should have spent money on this Welsh embankment; but whatever interested Shelley at the moment seemed to him the most important matter in the world. Then when his enthusiasm changed he forgot it altogether, if he could. He had already lost his enthusiasm for Miss Hitchener. Hogg's account of the matter is that "at first she possessed some influence over the young couple, but the charming Eliza would not tolerate any influence but her own. She had worked upon Harriet's feelings, and the good Harriet had succeeded in making his former favourite odious to Bysshe." No doubt also the angel of the letters ceased to appear an angel in the house. It would have been impossible for her, whatever her virtues, to live up to Shelley's opinion of her. We know no harm of Miss Hitchener. Hogg says that she had a prim, formal, didactic manner and speech. No doubt Shelley in four months of close intercourse found her a bore; and a bore very soon became a fiend incarnate to him. When once he discovered faults in a paragon he would admit no virtues. We do not know all the stages of the affair, but it was determined in London that Miss Hitchener should go. Hogg tells us that he went to see them one Sunday morning, and that Miss Hitchener was to go that evening. Shelley was engaged. Harriet had a headache ; so Hogg was condemned to take the two spinsters out for a walk. He went into St. James's Park with a lady on each arm. They quarrelled with each other across him. "The lovely Eliza attacked the foe with haughty contempt ; the bearded preceptress defended herself and offended her enemy with meek contumacy." But after a while the quarrel ceased and Miss Hitchener talked to Hogg about the rights of woman. This was a favourite subject with her and she wrote a poem on it beginning—

> "All, all are men—women and all!"

which Shelley would recite years afterwards and which even he found amusing.

They returned to the house and the day passed tranquilly. At tea Hogg turned the conversation again to the rights of woman. "The Goddess of Reason began incontinently to lecture with fluency and animation. Presently Bysshe quitted his chair and came and stood before her, listening with attention, and looking enthusiastic, as if his former interest had in some measure revived. The sisters eyed him with manifest displeasure, as a person holding treasonable communication with a public enemy." She took her leave, Hogg says, "freely, quietly, and civilly." In December Shelley wrote of her to Hogg in these terms :—

"The Brown Demon, as we call our late tormentor and schoolmistress, must receive her stipend. I pay it with a heavy heart and an unwilling hand ; but it must be so. She was deprived, by our misjudging haste, of a situation where she was going on smoothly : and now she says that her reputation is gone, her health ruined, her peace of mind destroyed by my barbarity ; a complete victim to all the woes mental and bodily that heroine ever suffered. This is not all fact, but certainly she is embarrassed and poor, and we being in some degree the cause, we ought to obviate it. She is an artful, superficial, ugly, hermaphroditical beast of a woman, and my astonishment at my fatuity, inconsistency, and bad taste was never so great as after living four months with her as an inmate. What would Hell be were such a woman in Heaven ?"

Thus it appears that Shelley was just to her in action but not in thought. He saw that he had been a fool for thinking her an angel, but not that his disgust for her was a mere reaction from his former raptures. In that disgust he indulged himself without restraint according to his habit. And he was as ready to imagine her a melodramatic villain as if she had been his father. "She is a woman of desperate views and dreadful passions," he said, "but of cool and undeviating revenge." She was, of course, nothing of the kind. She seems to have remembered Shelley with kindness. She became a schoolmistress again and found success and probably happiness in the calling which she ought never to have left.

Shelley returned to Wales on November 13. There was much distress at Tremadoc that winter and he was active among the poor, "visiting them in their humble abodes and supplying them with food, raiment, and fuel." But he was growing tired of Wales. "It is the last stronghold," he wrote, "of the most vulgar and commonplace prejudices of aristocracy. Lawyers of unexampled villainy rule and grind the poor, whilst they cheat the rich. . . . The poor are as abject as slaves, and the rich as tyrannical as bashaws." The embankment business began to irk him. "I have been teased to death for the last fortnight," he wrote to Hogg. ". . . I allude to the embankment affairs, in which I thoughtlessly engaged ; for when I come home to Harriet I am the happiest of the happy." In the same letter he says that "Queen Mab" has gone on but slowly, but is nearly finished. "They have teased me out of all poetry." He was not anxious now for a reconciliation with his family. "I question if intimacy with my relations would add at all to our tranquillity. They would be plotting and playing the devil, or showing us to some people who would do so; or they would be dull; or they would take stupid likes or dislikes; and they certainly might cramp our liberty of movement." He was very indignant at the sentence passed upon Leigh Hunt for his famous libel upon the Prince Regent. "He wrote to me," says Hunt, "making me a princely offer." But Hunt would take no money from his friends and sympathisers. Shelley discussed politics in his letters to Hogg. "Perhaps you will say that my Republicanism is proud; it certainly is far removed from pothouse democracy, and knows with what a smile to hear the servile applauses of an inconsistent mob. But though its cheeks could feel without a blush the hand of insult strike, its soul would shrink neither from the scaffold nor the stake, nor from those deeds and habits which are obnoxious to slaves in power." He was certainly not a complete democrat any more than St. Just; and if, like St. Just, he had got political power through revolution, he might have used it with philanthropic tyranny; though nothing, I think, would have tempted him to be cruel in action. His love of mankind in the abstract caused him to dislike most individual men because they did not love each other.

Shelley left Tremadoc because of an outrage as doubtful and mysterious as that which befell him at Keswick. Harriet's story is that on the night of February 26, when they had been in bed about half-an-hour, Shelley heard a noise below. He went downstairs with two pistols, *which he had loaded that night expecting to have occasion for them.* He heard footsteps and followed them from one room to another. Then a man fired at him but missed. Shelley fired in reply, but there was only a flash in the pan. The man then knocked Shelley down. In the struggle Shelley fired his second pistol which, he thought, wounded the man in the shoulder, for he uttered a shriek and cried, "By God, I will be revenged. I will murder your wife and will ravish your sister." He then fled. The household assembled in the parlour, where they waited for two hours. They then returned to bed, all except Shelley and his Irish man-servant, who stayed up. Three hours later Harriet heard another report. She ran downstairs and saw that Shelley's flannel gown and the window curtain had been shot through. Shelley had sent the servant to see what o'clock it was. While he was alone a man thrust his arm through the glass of the window and fired at him. Shelley's pistol again failed to go off. He then struck at the man with an old sword which he found in the house. The man tried to get the sword from him; but fled as the servant returned, and nothing more was seen or heard of him.

There has been some controversy as to whether Shelley imagined the whole attack. A man, Harriet says, in the neighbourhood, told the tradespeople "that it was a tale of Shelley's to impose upon them, that he might leave the country without paying his bills. This they believed, and none of them attempted to do anything towards his discovery." But there is no doubt that Shelley himself was in a distracted state the next morning. He thought he saw a man's face in the drawing-room window and shot the glass to shivers. He thought he saw a ghost or devil leaning against a tree and made a sketch of it. Then he set fire to a wood to burn the apparition. Poor Miss Hitchener has been suspected of the outrage and also the Irish servant; but the last suspicion seems as groundless as the first. The fact that Shelley went to bed with loaded pistols shows that he expected some kind of attack, and Harriet gives no reason for his expectation. He was therefore in a state of apprehension, and it took very little to make him imagine a great deal. The result of the affair was a flight to Ireland the next day. Why they went there we do not know. They reached Dublin on March 9, but did not stay there long. Poor Hogg had been asked to stay with them in Wales, now he was asked to go to Dublin. He did so, and found them flown to Killarney. Shelley heard of his arrival and flew back to Dublin, but before he got there Hogg had returned to London. Shelley determined to follow him, and he and Harriet reached London early in April 1813. They had left Eliza at Killarney in charge of Shelley's library, and Hogg tells us that he "was evidently weary of angelic guardianship, and exulted with malicious pleasure that he had firmly planted her at last. He made no secret of his satisfaction, but often gave vent to his feelings with his accustomed frankness and energy. The good Harriet smiled in silence and looked very sly."

They were still quite happy together and Harriet was now with child. Soon Eliza returned. Hogg was uncertain whether she lived constantly with them. "It seemed rather that she went and came in a hushed, mystical manner." Harriet was in good health and spirits, but Eliza deplored the state of her nerves. They stayed at an hotel in Albemarle Street, and afterwards in lodgings.

Shelley had made friends with a vegetarian family named Newton, and through them with Mrs. Newton's sister, a Mrs. Boinville, the widow of a French *émigré*. Mrs. Boinville, he said years afterwards, seemed to him the most admirable specimen of a human being he had ever seen. He soon had a rapturous friendship with her and met many strange people at her home. She and the Newtons were what we should now call "cranks," and Shelley always liked cranks at first, though he often tired of them quickly. But they were no doubt charming cranks, and kind to Shelley with a sentimental, motherly kindness. Hogg saw much of Shelley at this time and tells us a good deal of his ways of life. How he would make his meals in the street, buying a loaf and a few pudding raisins when he felt hungry, and eating them as he walked along. How he would make little bread pellets and flick them at people whom he met on his walks, hitting them usually on the nose. How, though he and Harriet were both vegetarians, they would provide a bad meat meal for Hogg; for Shelley, if asked to order dinner, would say, "Ask Harriet," and Harriet would say, "Whatever you please." But sometimes there was no meat and Harriet would tell Shelley to buy a shilling's worth of penny buns. He would then rush off with incredible alacrity and return in an instant stumbling and tumbling upstairs with the bag of buns open at the top in his hand. He would not wear a greatcoat in the coldest weather and went bareheaded as much as possible. Yet he was very fanciful about his health. When he coughed he would declare that he broke blood-vessels and spat blood;

but this was all fancy. Hogg's story of his elephantiasis illusion might be dismissed as an invention if it were not confirmed by other evidence. Hogg tells us that once in a crowded stage-coach Shelley sat opposite an old woman with very thick legs. He took it into his head that she had the elephantiasis and that he had caught it from her. He talked to his female friends about his symptoms and consulted a surgeon, who told him that he had not got it and could not have it. But he would not be convinced. He was perpetually examining his skin and the skin of others. Mrs. Newton's daughter remembered that one day as he was sitting in an arm-chair talking to her father and mother he suddenly slipped down to the ground, twisting about like an eel. They asked him what was the matter and he replied in an impressive tone, "I have the elephantiasis." Thomas Love Peacock, whom Shelley had probably first met in Wales the year before and who now saw a good deal of him, says that he was continually on the watch for symptoms of the disease. "He would draw the skin of his own hands, arms, and neck very tight, and if he discovered any deviation from smoothness he would seize the person next to him and endeavour by a corresponding pressure to see if any corresponding deviation existed. He often startled young ladies at an evening party by this singular process, which was as instantaneous as a flash of lightning."

This all sounds incredible, yet we have three independent witnesses to it; and it is of interest as showing how wild were Shelley's delusions and conduct. He was not mad; for he could always manage his mind when he chose, except at moments of extreme nervous excitement, and these passed quickly. But it is never safe to reason about his motives or his conduct as if he were an ordinary person; and above all it is never safe to believe his unconfirmed statements about anything.

Hogg tells us that he was always a great favourite with ladies. They found his conversation enchanting, and he would keep them up to all hours with it, for he took no note of time. It was always difficult to catch him, and when he was caught and "turned over to the ladies with, Behold your king! to be caressed, courted, admired and flattered, the King of beauty and fancy would too commonly bolt. . . . Unobserved and almost magically he vanished." He reminded Hogg of the goat which is said to vanish for one hour of the twenty-four and to spend it in the Shades. Hogg told him this legend and it pleased him so much that when he met a goat he would ask it with penetrating glances, "What news from Hades?"

A lady once remarked to Hogg that Shelley would make terrible havoc if he were at all rakish. He never was rakish, but he made havoc for all that, through not knowing himself and the nature of his own passions. But at this time he was still as innocent in act as in mind and no one had any reason to suspect him. No doubt with his childish beauty and helplessness in worldly matters he appealed to the maternal instinct that is in every good woman and girl; and no doubt he delighted in the kindness which that appeal provoked.

In June 1813 Harriet was delivered of a healthy girl, who was named Ianthe, like the heroine of "Queen Mab." In July they went to Bracknell in Berkshire to be near Mrs. Boinville; and there they were in the midst of vegetarians. In September Shelley wrote a sonnet to Ianthe in which he spoke tenderly of Harriet, and they were still happy together. After some wanderings they returned to London in December. In the first months of 1814 Shelley was often staying at Bracknell with Mrs. Boinville and reading Italian poetry with her and her daughter, Mrs. Turner. He was in straits for money and wrote to his father that he had exhausted all means of raising it, even post-obits. His father said he could not help him during his grandfather's lifetime, and his anxieties continued. Some doubt seems to have been raised about the validity of Shelley's Scotch marriage during his minority. So on the 24th of March he and Harriet were married again in London.

CHAPTER IV

"QUEEN MAB"

SHELLEY probably began "Queen Mab" at Lynmouth in 1812, though fragments of verse written before that time are said to be contained in it. It was sent to the printers in the spring of 1813. Two hundred and fifty copies of it were printed and about seventy of these were privately distributed in the summer. It was never published in the ordinary way. Shelley revised parts of it and the first two sections thus revised were published in 1816, with "Alastor," under the title of the "Dæmon of the World." No more of this revised version was published until 1876.

"Queen Mab" is the first of Shelley's works which shows any promise of his future greatness. The musical opening is the best known part of it, and this has given it more reputation than it deserves. The whole poem is not worth reading for its own sake; but it should be read by those who wish to understand the nature and growth of Shelley's mind. I shall treat it rather as a document than as a work of art.

While writing "Queen Mab" Shelley said: "The Past, the Present, and the Future are the grand and comprehensive topics of the poem." He had chosen the vastest subject he could find, not so much from overweening ambition as because he wanted a pretext for writing at large about what he loved and hated, and hoped and feared. The subject of "Queen Mab" is really the same as the subject of "Prometheus Unbound": the past and present misery of mankind and their future regeneration. The motto of "Queen Mab" is *Ecrasez l'infame,* and in it Religion is the source of all evil, like Jupiter in "Prometheus." Religion is to be superseded by the Spirit of Nature, as Jupiter by

Demogorgon in the later poem; while the Prometheus of "Queen Mab" is Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, about whom Shelley had already written both in verse and prose, and who is introduced, perhaps, so that he may deliver some of these earlier verses.

Shelley's main ideas and emotions changed but little in the course of his life. Growth and experience only gave him a greater power of expressing them. From first to last his mind was filled with a fierce impatience of our present imperfection and a vast desire and hope for a perfection to be. He always conceived of our imperfection, not as a process of growth, but as something imposed upon us by a malignant external power, upon the fall of which we should all at once become perfect. There was no conflict in his own mind, or, if there was, he never recognised it as a conflict of good and evil; and so he thought of the incessant conflict of life as entirely a struggle between the good that is within men and the evil that is outside them. Some men, of course, were all bad; they were the willing slaves of the tyrant evil. Others were all good; they were heroic rebels or meek victims.

In "Prometheus" he dramatised his ideas of evil and good and made shadowy persons of them. In "Queen Mab" they are still mere abstractions, quite inadequate, of course, to account for themselves and narrow with the narrowness of a merely destructive philosophy. Even Shelley, if he had lived in another age, would scarcely have tried to make a poem out of material so vast and vague; but he began to write at a time when the Romantic Revolution in poetry had destroyed all the literary traditions and conventions of the eighteenth century, while he himself was still content with its abstractions. He took all the romantic liberties, but had not got the romantic love of concrete things. There was nothing but his own inclination to suggest either a particular subject or a particular treatment to him, and by nature he was inclined to the extreme of vagueness in both. He had two main desires, one of the senses the other of the soul; and the one so instantly suggested the other that he could not distinguish between them. To him a beautiful woman was the symbol of the millennium, and the millennium meant the society of beautiful women.

Thus "Queen Mab" begins with a description of Ianthe, a beautiful girl, asleep and watched over by her lover.[1] While she sleeps the Fairy Queen, Mab, appears to her in a chariot—

> "Celestial coursers paw the unyielding air;
> Their filmy pennons at her word they furl,
> And stop obedient to the reins of light."

Queen Mab descends from the chariot and addresses Ianthe—

> "Soul of Ianthe, thou
> Judged alone worthy of the envied boon,
> That waits the good and the sincere; that waits
> Those who have struggled, and with resolute will
> Vanquished Earth's pride and meanness, burst the chains,
> The icy chains of custom, and have shone
> The day-stars of their age; Soul of Ianthe!
> Awake! Arise!"

We are given no particulars of Ianthe's heroic conduct, but have to take all her virtues on trust, as Shelley himself took the virtues of so many ladies who charmed him in the course of his life and who were, for a time, symbols to him of all virtue and wisdom and delight. The soul of Ianthe quits her body and travels away with Mab in the magic car. There are descriptions of the journey too vague to make much mark upon the mind, but, like the vapours of an incantation, promising clearer shapes of beauty in the future. They come to the ruins of Palmyra and to Jerusalem, which gives Mab an opportunity for a speech against the religion of the Jews. On other pretexts she talks against kings, against war, and against commerce. She has grown serious since Mercutio knew her, and prefers sermons to practical jokes. She gives a dismal account of the world as it is; and Ianthe asks whether there is any hope for it.

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[1] His name is Henry, but we are not told this until Ianthe wakes up in the last lines of the poem. In the "Dæmon of the World" Shelley names him at the beginning, thinking, no doubt, that we are not likely to be interested in his name just when we have done with him and Ianthe.

Mab replies that there is. At present falsehood triumphs in religion. Religion is the cause of all this evil and must be superseded by the Spirit of Nature, "all-sufficing power."

"There is no God!" she cries triumphantly, and summons up the spirit of Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, who contradicts her, painting a horrid picture of Jehovah and giving a new and heroic account of his own offence.

Ianthe is now to see the beautiful future, and this is the best part of the poem. We are not told, of course, how it is to come about, except that Religion is to fall before the Spirit of Nature, as Jupiter falls before Demogorgon in "Prometheus." The result in both cases is a universal harmony. Not only man but all nature becomes kind and good. No tempests vex the sea. The deserts change to woods and cornfields; and, where tigers once ate lambs, the daisy-spangled lawn smiles—

> "To see a babe before his mother's door,
> Sharing his morning meal
> With the green and golden basilisk
> That comes to lick his feet."

One of the most beautiful passages in English poetry is that in "Prometheus" which describes two halcyons, after the regeneration, feeding upon nightshade berries without harm. In "Queen Mab," too, we are told that—

> "Like passion's fruit, the nightshade's tempting bane
> Poisons no more the pleasure it bestows."

But what a difference there is between the dull and moralising statement of the first poem and the vivid incidents of the second.

The best lines in "Queen Mab" are those in which Shelley tells us how passion and reason are at one:—

> "Reason was free; and wild though Passion went
> Through tangled glens and wood-embosomed meads,
> Gathering a garland of the strangest flowers,
> Yet like the bee returning to her queen,
> She bound the sweetest on her sister's brow,
> Who meek and sober kissed the sportive child,
> No longer trembling at the broken rod."

Certainly passion and reason must be at one in heaven, and sometimes we hear them at one in music upon this earth. But music, like Shelley's most divine poetry, is prophetic; and at this time of his life he was apt to mistake prophecy for fact, and to suppose that in our present imperfection he could live that harmonious life which he dreamed of. Because his passion showed him prospects of pure delight, he thought it was reason, and followed it, like a Syren, to his own disaster.

At the end of the poem, and after an eloquent passage proclaiming the immortality of the soul, Queen Mab takes Ianthe back to her lover. Her soul and body were united:—

> "She looked around in wonder, and beheld
> Henry, who kneeled in silence by her couch,
> Watching her sleep with looks of speechless love,
> And the bright beaming stars
> That through the casement shone."

"Queen Mab" is written partly in blank verse, partly in that irregular rhymeless verse which Shelley got from Southey. In the versification there is a great advance upon all his former poetry and sometimes more than a promise of his future music. He had freed himself of his rocking-horse rhythms, and seldom relapsed into them afterwards.

One might suppose that rhyme would have been a better discipline for his vagueness and extreme fluency; but no doubt he trained his ear by writing rhymeless verse, and learned not to put a mechanical stress upon the last syllable of every line. In after years he spoke of "Queen Mab" as villainous trash, but he did not waste his time in writing it.

At this period he had not learnt to combine reason with passion in his art any more than in his life. He knew this himself and therefore added a prose commentary of notes to his poem. Some of these are mere rhetoric. Others are closely reasoned and prove that he had already a trained and masculine intellect. There is some rhetoric in the note on wealth; but it exposes very clearly the still persisting fallacy that luxury is "good for trade," and points out that money is a good only when distributed with some approach to equality, and a cause of impoverishment when collected in a few hands. We are all supposed to know this now; and it was not a new discovery even in Shelley's time, but now, as then, most prosperous people are content to ignore it. Shelley saw what danger there was in the accumulation of money, saw that it was the chief danger that threatened his country; and in this he was more sagacious at the age of twenty-one than many statesmen of experience.

There is an ominous note in favour of the abolition of marriage. It contains arguments specious in themselves, but based upon the assumption that men would all be good if laws did not make them bad. Shelley never could see that marriage is an imperfect institution in an imperfect world; and that men need to be trained to constancy. "Love is inevitably consequent upon the perception of loveliness." It withers under constraint; its very essence is liberty. He would not understand that love which begins with "the perception of loveliness" is a mere luxury, unless it changes into a trained habit; that men must exercise their will to make it that; and that marriage is intended to make them exercise their will in this way. It is strange that he should not have seen that marriage is a constraint which "tyrant man" has put upon himself for the sake of women and children, and the greatest triumph of reason over appetite ever accomplished. There is an ambiguity in Shelley's phrase, "the perception of loveliness," the more dangerous because he was not aware of it. Loveliness may mean physical beauty or that which deserves to be loved. The perception of the first comes by nature, the perception of the second must be trained if it is to persist and develop. Shelley supposed that in himself they were one and the same thing. He knew love only by its first rapture, when the perception of the first kind of loveliness heightens the perception of the other; and when that rapture was past in him he thought that there must be an end of love.

CHAPTER V

THE BREAK WITH HARRIET

THERE has been much controversy about the rights and wrongs of Shelley's estrangement from Harriet and flight with Mary Godwin. I shall deal with the disputed points only so far as they seem to me to concern Shelley's character. We do not know enough to come to very certain conclusions about the matter, and opposite conclusions have been based upon the facts we do know.

Since Shelley married Harriet again in March 1814 he cannot then have designed to separate from her. Yet only a week before he had written a letter to Hogg which proves that he was no longer happy with her. "I have been staying with Mrs. B(oinville) for the last month. I have escaped, in the society of all that philosophy and friendship combine, from the dismaying solitude of myself. . . . My heart sinks at the view of that necessity, which will quickly divide me from the delightful tranquillity of this happy home—for it has become my home. . . . I have sunk into a premature old age of exhaustion, which renders me dead to everything but the unenviable capacity of indulging the vanity of hope, and a terrible susceptibility to objects of disgust and hatred.

"Eliza is still with us—not here!—but will be with me when the infinite malice of destiny forces me to depart. I am now but little inclined to contest this point. I certainly hate her with all my heart and soul. It is a sight which awakens an inexpressible sensation of disgust and horror, to see her caress my poor little Ianthe, in whom I may hereafter find the consolation of sympathy. I sometimes feel faint with the fatigue of checking the overflow of my unbounded abhorrence for this miserable wretch. But she is no more than a blind and loathsome worm that cannot see to sting."

Then he quotes a stanza he has written, which, he says, has no meaning :—

"Thy dewy looks sink in my breast ;
Thy gentle words stir poison there ;
Thou hast disturbed the only rest
That was the portion of despair !
Subdued to Duty's hard control,
I could have borne my wayward lot :
The chains that bind this ruined soul
Had cankered then, but crushed it not."

Soon afterwards, moved by the same trouble, the first real and bitter trouble he had ever known, he wrote the first of his poems in which his genius was clear :—

"Away ! the moor is dark beneath the moon,
Rapid clouds have drunk the last pale beam of even :
Away ! the gathering winds will call the darkness soon,
And profoundest midnight shroud the serene lights of Heaven.
Pause not ! the time is past ! Every voice cries, 'Away !'
Tempt not with one last tear thy friend's ungentle mood :
Thy lover's eye, so glazed and cold, dares not entreat thy stay :
Duty and dereliction guide thee back to solitude.

Away, away ! to thy sad and silent home ;
Pour bitter tears on its desolated hearth ;
Watch the dim shades as like ghosts they go and come,
And complicate strange webs of melancholy mirth.
The leaves of wasted autumn woods shall float around thine head,
The blooms of dewy spring shall gleam beneath thy feet :
But thy soul or this world must fade in the frost that binds the dead,
Ere midnight's frown and morning's smile, ere thou and peace, may meet.

The cloud shadows of midnight possess their own repose,
For the weary winds are silent, or the moon is in the deep ;
Some respite to its turbulence unresting ocean knows :
Whatever moves or toils or grieves hath its appointed sleep.

Thou in the grave shalt rest:—Yet, till the phantoms flee
 Which that house and heath and garden made dear to thee e'erwhile,
Thy remembrance and repentance and deep musings are not free
 From the music of two voices and the light of one sweet smile."

This is not emotion remembered in tranquillity, but it is certainly poetry, and unlike the poetry of any other poet. Some of the language is still conventional and sentimental in meaning; but the music trembles and starts and rushes with misgiving and desire. It expresses the conflict in Shelley's mind, the bewildered ardour of youth that has lost its old object and dare not fasten on a new one; the impatient hunger for a delight that seems to be gone from life, and the despairing effort to accept life without it.

It is clear from this poem that Shelley, when he wrote it, was in a dangerous state of mind. He longed to be in love, yet had lost delight in loving his wife; and at home everything reminded him of a joy that was past.

In May he wrote a poem to Harriet in which he speaks as if he had lost her love and only wished to regain it:—

"Thy look of love has power to calm
 The stormiest passion of my soul;
Thy gentle words are drops of balm
 In life's too bitter bowl;
No grief is mine, but that alone
These choicest blessings I have known.

Harriet! if all who long to live
 In the warm sunshine of thine eye,
That price beyond all pain must give,—
 Beneath thy scorn to die;
Then hear thy chosen own too late
His heart most worthy of thy hate.

Be thou, then, one among mankind
 Whose heart is harder not for state,
Thou only virtuous, gentle, kind,
 Amid a world of hate;
And by a slight endurance seal
A fellow-being's lasting weal.

For pale with anguish is his cheek,
His breath comes fast, his eyes are dim;
Thy name is struggling ere he speak,
Weak is each trembling limb;
In mercy let him not endure
The misery of a fatal cure.

Oh, trust for once no erring guide!
Bid the remorseless feeling flee;
'Tis malice, 'tis revenge, 'tis pride,
'Tis anything but thee;
Oh, deign a nobler pride to prove
And pity if thou canst not love."

This poem seems to have more artifice than the last, but it may be taken to prove that Shelley was still loving or trying to love his wife, while fearing that she had ceased to love him. There are other words of his recorded to the same effect, and we may take it that the fear passed into a belief. But what grounds there were for it, or what excuse, or by what means or stages they became estranged from each other, we can only conjecture and that from slight materials. Harriet did not feed her child, and Peacock says: "I have often thought that if Harriet had nursed her own child and if the sister had not lived with them, the link of their married life would not have been so readily broken." Hogg tells us that Harriet lost her intellectual interests and became very fond of dress. Professor Dowden suggests that motherhood produced a natural change and development in her character which dismayed Shelley. This is likely enough. She was a school-girl when she married and ready to be as much like a Shelley in petticoats as she could. But when she became a mother she became a woman with her own tastes and thoughts different from his, and with a desire to live her own life. If that was so Shelley would find that his wife was a different person from what he had supposed, and not what he had bargained for. This change is the danger of all very early marriages; but it was peculiarly dangerous in this case, because Shelley was exacting to those whom he loved. He could not be content with placid affection from his wife. She must feel like him and think like him; kindle when he kindled and hate when he hated. It is likely enough that Harriet, while still loving him, began to take his ardours for granted and not very seriously; to betray absence of mind when he declaimed; to think more of the baby and her own clothes than of his poetry. And it is likely, if she did, that Shelley did not acknowledge to himself her right to be a person independent of him; that he took her independence for coldness and waning love; that he bewildered her and exasperated himself with appeals and remonstrances; and that all the while Eliza was telling her to pay no heed to him. Any difficulty between them must have been aggravated by the presence of Eliza, a woman who meant well perhaps, but who had nothing in common with Shelley and was determined not to lose her power over Harriet. Of course Shelley ought to have got rid of her long before; but he had no common sense in such matters, and no contrivance in getting rid of burdens that he could not bear. Eliza stayed on until he loathed the sight of her, and Harriet had not wit enough to see her own danger, or enterprise enough to put an end to it. She and Shelley were just the couple to drift on without ever speaking plain words to each other or facing the situation together. It was no use for him to say what he felt in verse, for she would think of verse as a game which he played and not as a means of telling the truth. Harriet was not a poet, and we know nothing of what she felt during the process of estrangement; but it is likely that she suffered as much as Shelley, though blindly and dumbly. Perhaps she talked or cried it all over with Eliza; but she would get no good advice from her. No doubt she was in fault in her way, as Shelley in his. What they both needed and lacked was a little sagacity.

In April Eliza seems to have left them; but matters did not mend. We know nothing for certain of what passed between them, but at the beginning of July Harriet was in Bath, and Shelley in London. From this fact it has been concluded that there was some kind of formal separation between them. It seems to be certain that they did not separate by mutual consent, and that Harriet was opposed to a separation; indeed a letter of hers, which I shall quote, goes to prove that she did not regard their separation as either final or formal.

But while she was in Bath a new and imminent danger was threatening their married life.

Shelley, though in want of money himself, was trying to find money for Godwin, who was always in straits. Thus he often went to see Godwin at his house in Skinner Street, and there he met Mary, Godwin's daughter by Mary Wollstonecraft, his first wife. Mary Godwin was then sixteen. She was less beautiful than Harriet, but had many charms, and an understanding far beyond Harriet's. Shelley may have tried not to fall in love with her, but he did fall in love with her, and she with him, pitying him no doubt for troubles which he did not hide from her. It seems probable that he told her that Harriet had been unfaithful to him and that he was not the father of a child with which she was then pregnant. Afterwards he owned himself mistaken about the child, but he persisted in his belief that Harriet had been unfaithful. The only authority for this belief appears to be a statement made by Godwin in a letter after her death. "The late Mrs. Shelley," said Godwin, "turns out to have been a woman of great levity. I know from unquestionable authority, wholly unconnected with Shelley (though I cannot with propriety be quoted for this), that she had proved herself unfaithful to her husband before their separation." This does not amount to much, and against it we have the expressed conviction of Peacock that "her conduct as a wife was as pure, as true, as absolutely faultless as that of any who for such conduct was held most in honour." We have also the statement of Trelawny that he was "assured by the evidence of the few friends who knew both Shelley and his wife—Hookham, who kept the great library in Bond Street, Jefferson Hogg, Peacock, and one of the Godwins—that Harriet was perfectly innocent of all offence."

Indeed it seems to be doubtful whether Shelley himself felt any certainty of Harriet's guilt before his flight with Mary; whether it was more than a fancy to which he sometimes gave way.

Peacock tells us that he saw Shelley when he was full of his new passion for Mary, and that then Shelley said to him, "Every one who knows me must know that the partner of my life should be one who can feel poetry and understand philosophy. Harriet is a noble animal, but she can do neither." Peacock then said, "It always appeared to me that you were very fond of Harriet;" and Shelley, without affirming or denying this, answered, "But you did not know how I hated her sister." Professor Dowden remarks that "it is evident that Shelley did not confide to Peacock the complete story of his alienation from Harriet." But it is strange that, if Shelley had so strong a reason for ceasing to love Harriet, he should give another and much weaker one. It seems more likely that he knew Peacock would ridicule his fancy of Harriet's unfaithfulness and therefore said nothing of it. We have to remember that he was always subject to delusions both about persons and places. When he wished to leave a place where he had sworn to live for ever, he would find there was some danger to his life there; and so, now that he was drawn powerfully away from Harriet, he may have found by the same process of delusion that she was unfaithful to him. I do not suggest that he consciously invented the theory of her unfaithfulness to suit his own purposes. He was incapable of such baseness. But his mind offered no resistance to fancies when they swarmed in to encourage his prejudices or desires. He had fancies against his father and against Miss Hitchener; and now that he had fallen in love with Mary, it was likely enough that he should have fancies against Harriet, which at one moment he thought to be true and at another knew to be false. If he had been convinced of her unfaithfulness he would surely have ceased all friendship with her, strange as his ideas were about sexual relations. But so far from breaking with her he wrote to her frequently, as the following letter from Harriet to Hookham, Shelley's publisher, proves. It is dated July 7, 1814:—

"You will greatly oblige me by giving the enclosed to Mr. Shelley. I would not trouble you, but it is now four days since I have heard from him, which to me is an age. Will you write by return of post, and tell me what has become of him, as I always fancy something dreadful has happened if I do not hear from him. If you tell me that he is well I shall not come to London; but if I do not hear from you or him I shall certainly come, as I cannot endure this dreadful state of suspense."

This is not the letter of a woman who has ceased to love her husband or who is formally separated from him. It reads as if she were afraid of his infidelity, not conscious of her own.

Shelley by now was deep in love with Mary and she with him. She is not to be blamed, I think, for allowing herself to fall in love with a married man. Her father and her mother had lived together before they married, and Shelley could quote Godwin as an authority for his own ideas about the marriage tie. If Shelley told her that his wife had been unfaithful to him, she would consider, no doubt, that he was free to love and be loved by another woman. And then Shelley was the disciple and would-be benefactor of her father. He was the most wonderful youth in England and seemed the most unfortunate, speaking like an angel exiled from his native heaven. We do not know much of the progress of their passion, but Hogg tells us how he first saw them meet. He and Shelley called on Godwin on June 8. They found that Godwin was out, and Shelley began to walk impatiently about the room. "The door was partially and softly opened. A thrilling voice called 'Shelley.' A thrilling voice answered, 'Mary!' And he darted out of the room, like an arrow from the bow of the far-shooting king. A very young female, fair and fair-haired, pale indeed, and with a piercing look, wearing a frock of tartan, an unusual dress in London at that time, had called him out of the room. . . . Her quietness certainly struck me, possibly also, for I am not quite sure on this point, her paleness and piercing look."

In June also Shelley wrote this poem to her—

"Mine eyes were dim with tears unshed;
Yes, I was firm—thus wert not thou;—
My baffled looks did fear,[1] yet dread,
To meet thy looks—I could not know
How anxiously they sought to shine
With soothing pity upon mine.

To sit and curb the soul's mute rage
Which preys upon itself alone;
To curse the life which in this cage
Of fettered grief that dares not groan,
Hiding from many a careless eye
The scornèd load of agony.

Whilst thou alone, then not regarded,
The   thou alone should be,
To spend years thus and be rewarded,
As thou, sweet love, requited me
When none were near—Oh! I did wake
From torture for that moment's sake.

Upon my heart thy accents sweet,
Of peace and pity, fell like dew
On flowers half dead; thy lips did meet
Mine tremblingly; thy dark eyes threw
Their soft persuasion on my brain,
Charming away its dream of pain.

We are not happy, sweet! our state
Is strange and full of doubt and fear;
More need of words that ills abate;—
Reserve or censure come not near
Our sacred friendship, lest there be
No solace left for thee and me.

Gentle and good and mild thou art,
Nor can I live if thou appear
Aught but thyself, or turn thine heart
Away from me, or stoop to wear
The mask of scorn although it be
To hide the love thou feel'st for me."

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[1] The word "fear" here must be wrong. The reader can emend it as he likes.

From this it appears that already they had been surprised into some kind of betrayal of their feelings towards each other. On July 7, the day on which Hookham received the letter from Harriet which I have quoted, Godwin appears to have got a suspicion, perhaps from Hookham, that Shelley and Mary were too fond of each other. He talked to Mary and wrote to Shelley. The result of which was that Shelley ceased to come to his house; and that Mary made up her mind she could not be his, though she would never cease to love him. But Shelley was only spurred to immediate action. He wrote to Harriet asking her to come to London, and she came on July 14. Then he seems to have proposed a separation, to which, as she told Peacock, she would not agree. She, expecting to be delivered of a child in five months, was made ill by the shock. Eliza nursed her and Shelley was constantly with her, showing kindness. His idea, apparently, was that by a mixture of kindness and reason he might induce her to consent to his new passion. At least that is Peacock's account of the matter; and it is confirmed by a letter which Shelley wrote to her after his flight with Mary and which I shall quote in due course. Indeed from that letter he would seem to have persuaded himself, or half-persuaded himself, that she did consent; and he took legal steps to settle money on her before his flight. She, on the contrary, believed that he was drawn away from her by a passing fancy and by the arts of Mary, and that he would come back to her. She thought that Mary's chief attraction was her mother's name. For this reason she probably seemed to Shelley more complaisant than she was; and so gave him an excuse for believing, what he wished to believe, that her opposition to a separation was not serious. She seems to have persisted in her hope that he would come back to her for some time after his flight with Mary, and had many interviews with him. It was only by slow degrees that she found she had lost him altogether. We do not know what was the result of that discovery upon her mind. We can only judge, and that most doubtfully, by the dreadful and obscure event.

It is easy to make a case for Shelley, either with or without conjectures against Harriet. But there is no reason, because he was a great poet and she a poor woman who came to a miserable end, why her memory should be sacrificed to his. If she was not unfaithful to him, then he did wrong to believe her unfaithful or to harbour any fancies of her unfaithfulness. It was always a weakness with him to believe what he wished to believe; and this weakness prevented him in this case, as in others of less importance, from understanding the true nature of the problem he had to deal with. We may take it that, when he began to be estranged from Harriet, neither he nor she tried to face the facts of the situation. He had long been accustomed to make an unreal romance of life so far as his own feelings were concerned. Since he fell out with his father, he made a romance of his father's plots and villainies; when he grew tired of Miss Hitchener, she became a woman of desperate views and dreadful passions, but of cool, undeviating revenge. In neither case did he make any effort to regulate his feelings with reason. And so, no doubt, it was, when his relations with Harriet became difficult. He fought against the decline of his love for her, but not with his reason. He had, indeed, no idea that love had any connection with reason. For him it was always "lyric love, half angel and half bird," that might depart as suddenly and unaccountably as it came. His dislike of marriage was based upon this conception of love, and therefore he had no belief in the sanctity of marriage to support his love through a crisis, and was at the mercy of his sudden fancies and disgusts.

It has been assumed that Harriet was no wife for him, even if she was faithful to him. But that was not the view of Peacock, who knew them both well, and who had no grudge against Shelley. He says of Harriet that: "She was fond of her husband, and accommodated herself in every way to his tastes. If they mixed in society, she adorned it; if they lived in retirement, she was satisfied; if they travelled, she enjoyed the change of scene." She was not a woman of genius, but genius would be indeed a misfortune if it made a man incapable of living with any woman who did not possess it; and as a matter of fact we know that Shelley was never passionately in love with Harriet, and yet lived happily with her for two years.

I have no desire to make too much of Shelley's errors in this matter. I remember that he was not yet twenty-two when he fled with Mary, and that most of us at that age are preserved from errors more disastrous only because we have not his daring. But this flight of Shelley's has been made a kind of test case on the privileges of genius, and a case much obscured by perversion or ignorance of the facts. Whatever privileges a man of genius may have, he cannot be justified by his own misconceptions, for they issue from the weakness, not from the strength, of his mind. It seems to me that Shelley's conduct to Harriet had nothing to do with his genius. He might have harboured the same delusions about her and about other people and things if he had had no genius whatever. It may be argued that genius is a sacred possession, that a man who possesses it has a right to sacrifice any person or thing that may interfere with its development, and that he alone must be the judge of what he should sacrifice. This, I suppose, is the case which the idolaters of genius will set up. The idolatry of genius seems to me to be as slavish as the idolatry of any other kind of power; and I am sure that Shelley himself, like all the children of light, would have disowned it. It is an easy passage from the idea that genius justifies anything to the idea that men are better without it; and the opinion that Shelley could not have written "Prometheus Unbound" if he had not left his wife and children, leads to the opinion that "Prometheus Unbound," like a pearl, is a mere beautiful accident of disease. No doubt genius is apt to overstrain the mind possessed by it; and therefore we must make every excuse for the vagaries of such a mind. But we must not confuse cause with effect. We must not suppose that a man's genius profits by these vagaries, any more than that the strength of an athlete is increased by the weariness of over-exertion.

Shelley and Mary did not cease to meet because he came no longer to Godwin's house. He knew that she was in the habit of visiting her mother's grave, and went there to see her. There, we learn from an account based no doubt upon Mary's recollections, "in burning words he poured forth the tale of his wild past—how he had suffered, how he had been misled; and how, if supported by her love, he hoped in future days to enrol his name with the wise and good, who had done battle for their fellow-men, and been true through all adverse storms to the cause of humanity. Unhesitatingly she placed her hand in his, and linked her fortune with his own." Mary Godwin, in her father's words, was singularly bold, somewhat imperious, and active of mind. Her desire of knowledge was great, and her perseverance in everything she undertook almost invincible. She was now to show her boldness; and all through her life she was to prove her perseverance in fostering the genius of her husband and in watching over the life of his son.

They determined to fly together on July 28, 1814. Mary left her father's house about four in the morning. Jane Clairmont, the daughter of the second Mrs. Godwin by her first marriage, came with her. They met Shelley at the corner of Hatton Garden, where he was waiting for them with a postchaise, watching, as he said, until the lightning and the stars became pale. According to Jane Clairmont's own account, she had no idea when she went out with Mary that a flight was intended; and was persuaded at the last moment to share that flight. But her stories are not to be trusted. Whatever reasons Shelley and Mary had for taking her with them, they then began a connection that was to be an incessant trouble to them both, and particularly to Mary. No doubt Jane, who was quite reckless, enjoyed the romance. They reached Dover before four and set off for Calais in a small boat at about six on a beautiful evening, as they did not dare to wait for the packet. Mary was seasick and lay in Shelley's arms through the night. A strong contrary wind sprang up, so that they were in some danger. They reached Calais about sunrise. Their luggage had been left to come over in the packet. With it arrived Mrs. Godwin, who tried to persuade Jane to come back with her; but Jane after some wavering refused. That night they slept at Boulogne and then set out in a cabriolet for Paris, which they reached on August 2. Shelley was expecting money from Hookham, the publisher; instead he got "a cold, stupid letter," saying that Mrs. Boinville's family were reduced to the utmost misery by the distant chance of their being called upon in the course of a year to pay £40 for him. Shelley himself was so little troubled by the thought that he might have to pay money in the future, and so ready to enter into engagements for anybody, that he could not understand such anxieties in others. Besides he was lost in the egotism of his love and wanted money at once himself; so poor Mrs. Boinville, although the most perfect of women, seemed now a mere irrelevant nuisance to him. He sold his watch and chain for eight napoleons. He was disappointed by the interior of Notre Dame, and in the Louvre found a picture of the Deluge terribly impressive. Mary, however, felt as if "our love would alone suffice to resist the invasions of calamity. She rested on my bosom, and seemed even indifferent to take sufficient food for the sustenance of life."

At last, on August 7, Shelley got a remittance of £60. They determined to walk to Uri in Switzerland; and the next morning Shelley went to the ass market to buy an ass that should carry their luggage and Mary, if she were not strong enough to walk. Napoleon had abdicated only a few months before, and France was still unsettled after the invasion and the disbanding of the army. They were told that the ladies would certainly be carried off; but they paid no heed. They set off for Charenton on the evening of August 8, but found the ass useless. At Charenton they sold it and bought a mule, with which they set out the next morning on their long journey; Shelley leading the mule on which rode Mary in a black silk dress, while Jane, also in a black silk dress, walked behind and, when she was tired, would succeed Mary on the mule. They were not molested, but when they reached the seat of the war found ruin everywhere, and in one place could get no milk because the Cossacks had taken all the cows. On the fifth day Shelley sprained his ankle and had to ride. That night they reached Troyes, where Shelley wrote the following letter to Harriet.

"My dearest Harriet,—I write to you from this detestable town; I write to show that I do not forget you; I write to urge you to come to Switzerland, where you will at last find one firm and constant friend, to whom your interests will be always dear, by whom your feelings will never wilfully be injured. From none can you expect this but from me—all else are either unfeeling or selfish, or have beloved friends of their own, as Mrs. Boinville, to whom their attention and affection is confined.

"I will write at length from Neufchatel, or you direct your letters, 'd'étre laissé a la Bureau de Poste Neufchatel' until you hear again. We have journeyed from Paris on foot, with a mule to carry our baggage; and Mary, who has not been sufficiently well to walk, fears the fatigue of walking. We passed through a fertile country, neither interesting from the character of its inhabitants nor the beauty of the scenery. We came 120 miles in four days; the last two days we passed over the country that was the seat of war. I cannot describe to you the frightful desolation of this scene; village after village entirely ruined and burned, the white ruins towering in innumerable forms of destruction among the beautiful trees. The inhabitants were famished; families once independent now beg their bread in this wretched country; no provisions; no accommodation; filth, misery, and famine everywhere (you will see nothing of this on your route to Geneva). I must remark to you, that dreadful as these calamities are, I can scarcely pity the inhabitants; they are the most unamiable, inhospitable, and unaccommodating of the human race. We go by some carriage from this town to Neufchatel, because I have strained my leg and am unable to walk. I hope to be recovered by that time; but on our last day's journey I was perfectly unable to walk. Mary resigned the mule to me. Our walk has been, excepting this, sufficiently agreeable; we have met none of the robbers they prophesied at Paris. You shall know our adventures more detailed, if I do not hear at Neufchatel that I am soon to have the pleasure of communicating to you in person, and of welcoming you to some sweet retreat I will procure for you among the mountains. I have written to Peacock to superintend money affairs; he is expensive, inconsiderate, and cold, but surely not utterly perfidious and unfriendly, and unmindful of our kindness to him; besides, interest will secure his attention to these things. I wish you to bring with you the two deeds which Tahourdin has to prepare for you, as also a copy of the settlement. Do not part with any of your money. But what shall be done about the books? You can consult on the spot. With love to my sweet little Ianthe, ever most affectionately yours, S.

"I write in great haste; we depart directly."

Never before or since can a man who had just run away from his wife have written to her giving an account of the country through which he passed in his flight, or hoping that he would soon have the pleasure of welcoming her to a sweet retreat among the mountains. It appears from this letter that Shelley had quite persuaded himself that things were as he wished them to be; that Harriet was reconciled to his behaviour, and that he was still her firm and constant friend, doing the best for her that could be done in the circumstances. He puts on an air of business and reason, as if there were no such thing as passion in the world, no such woman as Mary, and no such being as his daughter or the child that was still in Harriet's womb. And yet he could speak of Mary to her and send his love to his sweet little Ianthe, whom he had deserted with her mother. It is clear that he could play any tricks with his own mind, but, unfortunately, not with the facts.

On August 18 they reached Pontarlier, and next day came to Neufchâtel, where Shelley got some more money. On August 23 they were at Brünnen, where they took two rooms in a château, engaging them for six months at a guinea a month. Finding that the château was very uncomfortable, and that they had only £28 to last to December, they suddenly made up their minds to return to England at once, by water; Shelley no doubt forgetting that he had invited Harriet to come to Switzerland. At 7 A.M. on August 27 they set off in a boat for Lucerne. From there they went on the Reuss to Bâle, and thence down the Rhine to Cologne, from which place they drove to Rotterdam. They were in London on September 13, but not before they had run short of money.

Godwin would have nothing to do with them, except that he took all the money from Shelley that he could get. His position was this—since he was Shelley's debtor and hoped to increase his debt, he could not forgive him and Mary, lest he should be suspected of doing so for a bribe. Shelley himself was in great straits for money and remained so for some months. When he went to his banker he found that all his money had been drawn by Harriet. According to Jane, he then went to Harriet for money and got £20 from her, together with some natural reproaches. It seems that the poor woman still expected that he would come back to her. Mary's journal in October notes that "a good-humoured letter" had been received from Harriet. Then came a rumour that Harriet had been plotting to have Godwin arrested for debt. On November 30 Harriet was delivered of a boy, an eight months' child. Shelley did not hear of it for a week. On December 6 there is this entry in Mary's diary: "A letter from Hookham to say that Harriet has been brought to bed of a son and heir. Shelley writes a number of circular letters of this event, which ought to be ushered in with ringing of bells, &c., for it is the son of his *wife*. A letter from Harriet confirming the news, in a letter from a *deserted wife!!* and telling us he has been born a week." Shelley saw Harriet the next day but they quarrelled. The baby was named Charles Bysshe. On December 20 Harriet threatened legal proceedings. On January 2, 1815, Mary's diary contains this note: "Harriet sends her creditors here; nasty woman. Now we must change our lodgings." Shelley continued to see Harriet at intervals for some months at least, but then lost sight of her. The last interview we hear of was on April 22, 1815.

Those who are inclined to think of Shelley's desertion of his first wife as a romantic event, or a symptom of his genius, or a heroic protest against the tyranny of convention, or anything else that it was not, should give attention to the squalid incidents of his life at this time, when he was getting money from the wife he had deserted, and trying to persuade her and himself that he had not deserted her, dodging bailiffs, and haggling with money-lenders.

It was all an expense of spirit in a waste of shame, with no profit either to his character or to his genius ; and the passages from Mary's Journal, which I have quoted, prove that even she, the kindest and most generous of women, was so wrought upon that she wrote bitterly and meanly of the poor woman she had wronged. Before we can recognise the true romance we must clear our minds of the false ; the purpose of what is called realism is to dispel the false romance, and there would be no need for it if false romance were not always gathering about reality and hiding the significance of its imperfections. Shelley had a noble character and a great genius ; but these both grew out of many infirmities of heart and mind. He was not a vapid angel singing silly hymns ; but a man who only learnt to live well and write well by sharp experience. From this time onwards the story of his life and art is one of continual advance. He was never cured of his infirmities ; to the end they appeared in his poetry and troubled Mary, as they had brought disaster to Harriet ; but his character improved almost as much as his art, and the excellences of both came to be far greater than the defects.

Jane Clairmont was still living with the Shelleys. At this time she called herself Clara ; afterwards Clare or Claire. She soon became a nuisance to Mary and even to Shelley ; though he always took a sentimental interest in her, which often troubled his wife. Clara was a girl who might have been happy and useful and healthy in her mind if she had married a kind and sensible husband and borne him children. Nothing could be worse for her than to live with Shelley and Mary. She was hysterical and full of wild ambitions, no doubt because she needed to marry. She thought of herself as the centre of the universe; and in that household she was only a third person with no function to perform. There was a romantic rumour that Godwin or his wife designed to shut her up in a convent. Therefore Shelley must protect her from tyranny and teach her Greek. Very soon Mary began to fret at his interest in her. There is an entry in her Diary for December 6, 1814: "Very unwell. Shelley and Clara walk out, as usual, to heaps of places." Mary was already with child, and no doubt wished for Shelley's companionship when she could not go out. She got little of the tranquillity that she needed. In October she only saw Shelley at short interviews, for he was hiding from bailiffs, and she had for the most part to content herself with frequent and rapturous letters. "It seems as if you alone," he wrote, "could shield me from impurity and vice. If I were absent from you long I should shudder with horror at myself; my understanding becomes undisciplined without you. I believe I must become in Mary's hands what Harriet was in mine. Yet how differently disposed—how devoted and affectionate, how, beyond measure, reverencing and adoring the intelligence that governs me!"

A few days before this there is an entry in his Journal from which it appears that he was noticing his own weakness and making up his mind not to waste his emotions on other women besides Mary:—

"Jane's insensibility and incapacity for the slightest degree of friendship. The feelings occasioned by this discovery prevent me from maintaining any measure in security. This highly incorrect; subversion of the first principles of true philosophy; characters, particularly those which are unformed, may change. Beware of weakly giving way to trivial sympathies. Content yourself with one great affection—with a single mighty hope; let the rest of mankind be the subjects of your benevolence, your justice, and, as human beings, of your sensibility; but, as you value many hours of peace, never suffer more than one even to approach the hallowed circle."

This is very good advice and the first sign we have that Shelley was aware of the necessity for mental and spiritual, as well as physical, monogamy. Like many men he was, I believe, polygamous by nature, and inclined to talk like a lover to any woman who took his fancy. I cannot but suspect a polygamous instinct in his treatment of Harriet after his flight with Mary. I do not mean that he had the design of living with two wives at once ; but that the shifting of his passion from Harriet to Mary seemed to him of far less moment than it was, because his passion shifted so easily and was so easily aroused. And Harriet had the same idea. She thought he would come back to her and therefore did not give up all relations with him. He, no doubt, had no clear theory in the matter ; but, accepting physical monogamy as a necessity, he was still eager to indulge himself in polygamous emotions, partly because they were a great pleasure to him and partly because he did not see their physical cause. Mary, of course, saw it, and was the more apprehensive because of the irregularity of her position. If she had not managed him with delicate tact, and if she had not had qualities which endeared her to him more and more, there might have been a second disaster like the first. As it was, he caused her anxiety to the end of his life ; but they were on such terms that she could speak to him plainly and even laugh at him, and thus she kept him to herself through all his naughty and passing fancies.

On this occasion it would appear that Clara had seemed to want more than friendship and had startled Shelley into a sense of the danger of spiritual flirtations. She was hysterical, and after sitting up late with Shelley until they were both overwrought, had burst in upon him with the story that her pillow had been supernaturally removed from her bed to a chair. Shelley took the story quite seriously and they sat by the fire "at intervals engaged in awful conversation relative to the nature of these mysteries." At dawn Jane saw something dreadful in Shelley's expression, and fell into convulsions, shrieking and writhing on the floor. Soon even Shelley saw that she was playing hysterical tricks and made this entry in his Journal: "The next morning the chimney board in Jane's room is found to have walked leisurely into the middle of the room, accompanied by the pillow, who, being very sleepy, tried to get into bed again, but fell down on his back."

Yet the poor Jane was making some efforts to behave well. She quarrelled with Shelley but saw that he was patient and kind with her. Here is an extract from her Diary:—

"Shelley comes into my room and thinks he was to blame, but I don't. How I like good, kind, explaining people!"

In this troubled time Shelley was paying for past follies, and learning from what he suffered and the effort to do better. He saw how much he needed tranquillity to practise his art. Peacock tells us that once when he had been quoting Wordsworth he suddenly asked, "Do you think Wordsworth could have written such poetry if he ever had dealings with money-lenders?" He was learning that a man of genius must waste a great part of his genius unless he orders his life well. He needs to practise a wise economy as much as a man of business.

On January 6, 1815, Sir Bysshe Shelley died, aged eighty-three. Shelley went to Field Place to hear the will read. He was refused admittance; so he sat by the door and read "Comus." There were certain estates settled on him the reversion of which it was possible for his father to purchase from him at once. Timothy was eager to do this, because he wished to keep the family property together and he feared that Shelley would dissipate it. He wished his younger son John to be his heir; and he had long been engaged in futile negotiations with Shelley to this end. Now that there were some estates which might be secured to John he was ready to pay for the chance of securing them. Thus in June 1815 he agreed to pay Shelley an income of £1000 a year and about £5000 down for his debts, which included £1000 promised to Godwin. Shelley at once sent Harriet £200; and appears to have made her an allowance of £200 a year. As she still had the same sum from her father, she was now in no want of money.

In February Mary was delivered of a seven-months' child, a girl. No doubt the premature birth was the result of worry and anxiety. The child died on March 6, and Mary grieved much for it, and fretted at the continual presence of Clara. In May Clara was got rid of for a time and there is a note in Mary's Journal: "I begin a new journal with our regeneration." Clara went to Lynmouth. In July Shelley was looking for a house in South Devon and Mary was at Clifton. From a letter she wrote on July 27 we can learn of her anxieties about Shelley and of her way of managing him. She thinks they have been apart too long. "We ought not to be absent any longer; indeed we ought not. I am not happy at it." "You will say, shall we neglect taking a house—a dear home? No, my love, I would not for worlds give up that; but I know what *seeking* for a house is, and, trust me, it is a very, *very* long job, too long for one love to undertake in the absence of the other. Dearest, I know how it will be; we shall both of us be put off, day after day, with the hopes of the success of the next day's search, for I am frightened to think how long."

Then comes this significant passage:—

"Pray, is Clara with you? for I have enquired several times, and no letters; but, seriously, it would not in the least surprise me (if you have written to her from London, and let her know that you are without me) that she should have taken some such freak."

We do not know whether Clara was with him, but he was soon with Mary and took a house, not in Devonshire, but at Bishopsgate, close to Windsor Forest. Here he conceived the project of rowing far up the Thames; and at the end of August started with Mary, Peacock, and Clara's brother Charles. They rowed for ten days, as far as they could. Shelley had the idea of entering a canal at Lechlade and so passing to the Severn and tracking that river also to its source. But even this idea did not content him; he would go by canals and rivers from North Wales to Durham and the Lakes, then to the Tweed and on to the Forth and the Falls of Clyde. But the commissioners would not let them through the Severn Canal for less than £20. So that he had to fancy and describe all these river wanderings in "Alastor."

The air and exercise did Shelley much good. "He has now," says Charles Clairmont, "the ruddy, healthy complexion of the autumn upon his countenance, and is twice as fat as he used to be." A little time before he was supposed to be in a galloping consumption. All his life he suffered from mysterious pains, but these were probably the result of indigestion, brought on by his habits of eating. His constitution must have been sound, although his nerves were often overwrought. Peacock induced him to eat flesh for a time, and maintained that he was much the better for it.

The "Lines on Lechlade Churchyard" were the result of this expedition. They are the earliest example of Shelley's power of generalised yet vivid description. He could convey an impression by the quality rather than the sense of his language, as Constable, in his sketches, by the quality of his paint.

Thou too, aerial Pile, whose pinnacles
   Point from one shrine like pyramids of fire,
Obeyest in silence their sweet solemn spells,
   Clothing in hues of heaven thy dim and distant spire,
Around whose lessening and invisible height
Gather among the stars the clouds of night."

He was to do far better than this in a few years; but no one except him could have written this.

When he returned to Bishopsgate he wrote "Alastor," the first of his longer poems that should be read for its own sake. From this time onwards the chief documents for his life are his poems; and they will be the chief documents for this account of him. "Alastor" was published in March 1816. In January Mary had given birth to a boy, who was christened William, after Godwin.

CHAPTER VI

"ALASTOR"

IN his preface to "Alastor" Shelley says that "it represents a youth of uncorrupted feelings and adventurous genius led forth by an imagination inflamed and purified through familiarity with all that is excellent and majestic, to the contemplation of the universe. . . . So long as it is possible for his desire to point towards objects thus infinite and unmeasured he is joyous, and tranquil, and self-possessed. But the period arrives when these objects cease to suffice. His mind is at length suddenly awakened and thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself. He images to himself the Being whom he loves. . . . The vision in which he embodies his own imaginations unites all of wonderful or wise or beautiful, which the poet, the philosopher, or the lover could depicture. . . . He seeks in vain for a prototype of his conception. Blasted by disappointment, he descends to an untimely grave."

Yet his fate, Shelley considers, is more desirable than the fate of those who are "deluded by no generous error, instigated by no sacred thirst of doubtful knowledge, duped by no illustrious superstition, loving nothing on this earth and cherishing no hopes beyond." These "have their apportioned curse. . . . They are morally dead. They are neither friends, nor lovers, nor fathers, nor citizens of the world, nor benefactors of their country." His conclusion, not expressed in the poem itself, is that to attempt to live without human sympathy is fatal for men whether high or low minded. "Those who love not their fellow-beings live unfruitful lives, and prepare for their old age a miserable grave." No doubt he began to be aware of a lack of human sympathy in himself, and to see that loving humanity at large is not the same thing as loving particular human beings.

But in his poem he is still only concerned with the youth who seeks for the ideal in the form of a perfect woman. He is, of course, a poet, and drawn, in an abstract style, from Shelley himself and his own experience. Shelley's mind was full of his voyages on the Reuss, the Rhine, and the Thames. Therefore the poet makes a long river voyage. He has Shelley's passion for knowledge. In his infancy he has been nurtured "by solemn vision and bright silver dream." He has a thirst for the fountain of divine philosophy; he eats no meat and loves wild animals, such as doves, squirrels, and antelopes—

"Virgins, as unknown he passed, have pined
And wasted for fond love of his wild eyes."

Also—

"When early youth had passed, he left
His cold fireside and alienated home
To seek strange truths in undiscovered lands."

In the course of his wanderings he came to the Vale of Cashmere and there while he slept—

"A vision on his sleep
There came, a dream of hopes that never yet
Had flushed his cheek. He dreamed a veilèd maid
Sate near him, talking in low solemn tones.
Her voice was like the voice of his own soul
Heard in the calm of thought.

. . . .

Sudden she rose,
As if her heart impatiently endured
Its bursting burthen: at the sound he turned,
And saw by the warm light of their own life
Her glowing limbs beneath the sinuous veil
Of woven wind, her outspread arms now bare,
Her dark locks floating in the breath of night,
Her beamy bending eyes, her parted lips
Outstretched, and pale, and quivering eagerly.

His strong heart sunk and sickened with excess
Of love. He reared his shuddering limbs and quelled
His gasping breath, and spread his arms to meet
Her panting bosom. . . . She drew back awhile,
Then, yielding to the irresistible joy,
With frantic gesture and short breathless cry
Folded his frame in her dissolving arms.
Now blackness veiled his dizzy eyes, and night
Involved and swallowed up the vision; sleep,
Like a dark flood suspended in its course,
Rolled back its impulse on his vacant brain."

When he awoke to the cold light of morning he found he had been fooled by a dream; and the rest of the poem describes his wanderings in search of that fleeting shade, and his death, foiled in the wilderness. By the lone Chorasmian shore he embarks in a shallop and is carried far over the sea to the foot of the Caucasus. Then a whirlpool carries him through a cavern into a stream among the mountains and through many wonderful places wonderfully described. At last, in a mountain solitude, he dies, gazing at the moon, and just as she sinks behind the hills.

The poem contains 750 lines of blank verse, and I give this bald abstract of it only to show the character of its theme. Keats took the same theme for his "Belle Dame sans Merci," but his poem is all concentration and conscious and triumphant art. Shelley's is all diffusion, and he shows but little art in the management of it. The event for Keats is everything and every word is concerned with it. Shelley almost loses it in description, much of it irrelevant. In fact his poem really has two subjects. There is the vision and the wild quest for the reality ending in death; and there is the description of mountain and river scenery. Of course there is an attempt to make the descriptions part of the quest; but there can be no doubt that they come in because Shelley had enjoyed his river voyages, not because they grew out of his conception of the poet's fate. This vague and divided purpose is a besetting weakness of the romantic poets, who were all apt to start upon a long poem without knowing what they would make of it, and to use it as an excuse for saying whatever they wanted to say.

"Alastor" is meant to be a narrative poem, but it has not enough incident for its length, and constantly tends to become lyrical. Therefore it is remembered not for the impression made by the whole story, for that is vague and weak, but for separate lyrical passages. It expresses certain of Shelley's own emotions which were too vague and too little connected with each other to be expressed in a story.

Mrs. Shelley, in her note to the poem, says that "a very few years, with their attendant events, had checked the ardour of Shelley's hopes, though he still thought them well grounded;" and she adds that "the death which he had often contemplated during the last months as certain and near, he here represented in such colours as had, in his lonely musings, soothed his soul to peace."

No doubt "Alastor" expresses a reaction in Shelley's mind from that old confidence of his that the ideal is attainable in this world. He, like other youths, had hoped that love would bring him all imaginable delight; but from the first he had combined and confused his dream of love with dreams of the millennium. Whenever he saw a beautiful girl he thought of her as an agent for accomplishing the millennium, and of the millennium itself as a kind of Paradise of inspired houris. There was something noble in this association of ideas. Shelley was not content only with the idea of his own happiness; he wanted the universe to share his raptures. But there was also somethnig enervating and dangerous; and now he had begun to see the danger and to be dismayed by it. After he had left Harriet for Mary, no doubt he found himself forced to face the facts of life. Mary had seemed to him his ideal, but in winning her he had not entered into the millennium. Indeed the first year of his life with her had been full of sordid troubles; and now that they had won a little peace, he had time to experience a great disillusionment, not with Mary, but with love itself. Thus that ideal which he had pursued so recklessly, now seemed to him a terrible thing which lured men on to destruction through their noblest hopes and desires. He would not forswear it altogether; for without it life seemed empty of all significance. Yet it could no longer give him a sure faith in life, for what could be the meaning of things if men were to die still mocked by their ideal, and if there were nothing beyond death?

In "Alastor" Shelley seems indeed to be beating his wings in the void, an angel without a heaven, and suddenly aware that there is no home for him in the universe, and no future except to tower into nothingness until his wings fail and his heart breaks. This notion of his own fate, which is the main theme of "Alastor," came back to him again and again in after years, often cutting short his inspiration with a sudden fall as swift and beautiful as its rise. But behind the despair of a great poet there is always an unconscious faith without which he could make no music. For if he were utterly given up to despair he could say nothing; and that is why beauty justifies the wildest lamentations of Shelley. Whatever the sense of the words may be there is hope and even triumph in that emotion which the music communicates:—

> "Art and eloquence,
> And all the shows o' the world are frail and vain
> To weep a loss that turns their lights to shade.
> It is a woe 'too deep for tears' when all
> Is reft at once, when some surpassing spirit,
> Whose light adorned the world around it, leaves
> Those who remain behind, not sobs or groans,
> The passionate tumult of a clinging hope;
> But pale despair and cold tranquillity,
> Nature's vast frame, the web of human things,
> Birth and the grave, that are not as they were."

These are the closing lines of "Alastor," and they sound with a music then new to the world, a music still not quite sure of itself or what it means, but already clear and irresistible. A prose paraphrase of these lines, however close to the sense, would misrepresent them, for it would fail to express just what gives them value, the delight of a great poet in what his reason, for the moment, tells him to despair of.

This despair, though it haunted him through life, did not silence his music, for it was only the pain of growth and adjustment, and rather a fear of despair than despair itself. Many men, as Shelley said in his preface to "Alastor," are too easily reconciled to the imperfections of this life, reconciled not by love and the wisdom of experience, but by mere apathy. His own fault lay the other way. He fretted against the universal imperfection, because he was not aware that he himself and all his ideas of perfection shared in it. He did not understand that in his hunger for the ideal there was a mixture of mere appetite; that an instinct altogether animal helped to form his visions of a perfect woman, and of the raptures that he would enjoy when he met her. It is the essence of appetite that it ceases when satisfied. It is the essence of ideals that they and their delights shall last for ever. Thus when appetites and ideals are combined and confused together there is a mixture of the mortal with the immortal; and when appetite, which has given a too definite and immediate form to the ideal, dies in its own satisfaction, the ideal remains unsatisfied and betrayed. This fact is what Shelley expressed in the vision of "Alastor" with its ecstasy of the senses, and in the poet's forlorn waking from it. But if he had understood thoroughly what he was expressing he would not have made his poet die. Men do not die of these disillusionments. They suffer great pain and, if they are poets, express it in verse. The confusion of ideals with appetites is a phase of growth in all men who are both passionate and imaginative; and those who continue to grow outgrow it, and understand themselves and life better for the experience. Nor is it all error; for in the first wonder and glory of love there is a divine mystery not to be explained as a mere trick of nature played upon the nobler kind of men, that she may subdue them to her own purposes. The perceptions of a man possessed by the real passion of love are not distorted, but sharpened to see a real divinity in the woman he loves, a divinity which she shares with all human beings but which it needs heaven-sent moments to recognise. Love, in fact, is a kind of inspiration, like that heightened sense of the beauty and glory of life which comes to us all at times and which then we know is the best wisdom. This heightened sense cannot last because our minds and bodies cannot sustain it; but it is not therefore mere illusion. Nor is the first passion of love mere illusion because it passes. And as moments of inspiration leave behind them in the mind of the wise man a conviction of their truth so that he is on his guard against the disillusionment of mere reaction, so the first passion of love should leave a convinced tenderness behind it, changing into a habit of affection more secure and tranquil than itself.

Shelley, with his hunger for perfect happiness and his impatience of the fact that it cannot be sustained in this life, was too much inclined to pursue the first rapture of love for its own sake, and when it was spent to seek for its renewal in a new object. The man who makes a practice of doing this soon acquires a false sensibility and falls into mock raptures. "Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds"; and his sham passions are to real ones what bad art is to good.

Shelley was always in some danger of this kind of corruption; and all through his life he showed symptoms of it, which alarmed Mary and sometimes tainted his poetry. But with her wise and tender help he always kept his love of her; and he was too great a man and a poet, too much involved in life and in the industry and various delights of his art, ever to become a mere specialist in affairs of the heart or the body. The ideas of "Alastor" recur in his later poetry, but other and more fruitful ideas inform his greatest works and exercise the highest faculties of his mind, so that he grows both in power and wisdom.

Already in "Alastor" Shelley showed himself a greater master of blank verse than any other poet of the time. He was the only one of the romantic poets who wrote blank verse that was quite original and yet never prosaic. He made it swifter and more lyrical than it ever had been before, distinguishing it from prose without any contortions of language. In the blank verse of "Alastor" we can see here and there the influence of Wordsworth, of Milton, and of Shakespeare; but it is not a mere patchwork of styles. He uses the manner of each poet for his own purposes and subject to his own inspiration. Here is a Miltonic passage:—

> "Where the secret caves
> Rugged and dark, winding among the springs
> Of fire and poison, inaccessible
> To avarice or pride, their starry domes
> Of diamond and of gold expand above
> Numberless and immeasurable halls
> Frequent with crystal column, and clear shrines
> Of pearl, and thrones radiant with chrysolite."

Here is one that recalls Shakespeare at the beginning:—

> "Heartless things
> Are done and said i' the world, and many worms
> And beasts and men live on, and mighty Earth
> From sea and mountain, city and wilderness,
> In vesper low or joyous orison,
> Lifts still its solemn voice."

But after a line or two it becomes half Milton, half pure Shelley. The influence of Wordsworth is more general and shows itself not so much in any tricks of language as in ideas and in the use of blank verse to express them. Nowhere in "Alastor" are there single lines as good as the best of Wordsworth's, for nowhere is there the same weight and consistency of thought labouring to express itself. Shelley had come by his Wordsworthian ideas easily enough, and he expressed them easily and fluently. Thus nothing is said in the poem that advances the history of the human mind, like some passages in the "Excursion" and the "Prelude." But Shelley already knew, better than Wordsworth ever knew, the difference between poetry and prose. His weaker passages are not flat, like Wordsworth's, but vague and empty; and all through the poem there is an impetus of continual emotion which we never find in Wordsworth's blank verse. That impetus quickens all

Shelley's best poetry and compensates for its lack of weight and richness. He gets his force from his speed and seems always to be mounting towards some far-off, unseen goal, except when he falls suddenly like a wounded bird. In later years there was more purpose and determination in his flight; and then he became the greatest lyric poet of his country, perhaps the greatest of whom we have any knowledge.

There has survived a prose fragment on Love which Shelley probably wrote about the same time as "Alastor," and which tells us more than most of his prose works about his most instinctive and persistent ideas. He says that, when he has thought to unburthen his inmost soul to other men, he has found his language misunderstood like one in a distant and savage land. Everywhere he has sought sympathy and found only repulse and disappointment. "We are born into the world, and there is something within us which, from the instant that we live, more and more thirsts after its likeness. . . . We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of everything excellent and lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man . . . a soul within our own soul that describes a circle around its proper Paradise, which pain and sorrow and evil dare not overleap. To this we eagerly refer all sensations, thirsting that they should resemble or correspond with it." And he goes on to say that what love aims at is the discovery of another soul in perfect correspondence with this one. The fragment ends with a passage upon the love of nature:—

"In solitude or in that deserted state when we are surrounded by human beings and yet they sympathise not with us, we love the flowers, the grass, the waters, and the sky. In the motion of the very leaves of spring, in the blue air, there is then found a secret correspondence with our heart. There is eloquence in the tongueless wind, and a melody in the flowing brooks and the rustling of the reeds beside them, which by their inconceivable relation to something within the soul, awaken the spirits to a dance of breathless rapture, and bring tears of mysterious tenderness to the eyes, like the enthusiasm of patriotic success, or the voice of one beloved singing to you alone."

We might take this for a piece of mere rhetoric if it were not by the author of "The Cloud." From that and other poems we know that Shelley was speaking the truth about himself, though not in his own true language, when he wrote it, and as it is true that he could love the beauty of the earth and sky as other men can love human beauty and could see the same virtue and significance in it, so it is also true that he was aware of an ideal in himself, a soul within his soul, by which he measured all things and with which he aspired to master the universe, to shatter it to bits, and then remould it nearer to his heart's desire. It was in the strength and persistence of this ideal passion that he varied from the kindly race of men, seeming to live for some great private end of his own, and in no way to be subject to the laws that connect men with other living things. At least he was scarcely aware of his own body, except when it troubled him with pain, or of any carnal mixture in his passions. He hated the flesh like a puritan; but instead of mortifying it, he ignored its existence, and glorified love, not as a natural function, but as if it were an inspiration and produced children as poetry and music are produced. It is easy for us to see his errors; but he seemed to those who knew him, and he seems to us when we read his poetry, not a mere fanatic wild with beautiful illusions, but a being prophetic of some higher state to which mankind shall attain, and unfit for this life only because he was fit for a better.

CHAPTER VII

THE SWISS TOUR AND THE DEATH OF HARRIET

GODWIN was still troubling Shelley with his righteous indignation and his demands for money. He insisted that there should be only business communications between them. He would take cheques, but they must not be made payable to him. This scruple was not so pedantic as it seemed, for there was a report that he had sold Mary and Claire to Shelley, each for a good round sum. At that time the orthodox were ready to believe anything of the unorthodox. Morality, religion, and the British Constitution must stand or fall together; and any one who was against one of them in any particular was against all three in everything.

Shelley was very patient with Godwin, less perhaps because he had run away with his daughter than because Godwin was the author of "Political Justice"; and he wrote him business letters explaining with lucidity and precision the complicated state of his own affairs and the difficulty which he found in helping him. All through his life his generosity and patience with Godwin and other persons, who took all they could get from him, were wonderful. He seemed to think it was his duty to give money to any one who asked for it. He was a giver by nature, and it came as easily to him to give with delicacy as to be a gentleman in other matters. But at last Godwin provoked him to anger, and he wrote: "Do not talk of *forgiveness* again to me, for my blood boils in my veins, and my gall rises against all that bear the human form, when I think of what I, their benefactor and ardent lover, have endured of enmity and contempt from you and all mankind."

This feeling of his, that he meant well by all the world and that the world repaid him with enmity and contempt, was the chief reason, perhaps, why he determined to go abroad early in 1816. No doubt Mary was made to feel the irregularity of her position at every turn. They had few friends in England and might make more abroad, where they could also live more cheaply. But Peacock tells us that Shelley in this case, as when he left Keswick and Tremadoc, said that he was threatened by a mysterious peril, and in this case, as in the others, Peacock thought that the peril was the effect rather than the cause of his desire to go. This is Peacock's story:—

"I was alone at Bishopsgate with him and Mrs. Shelley, when the visitation alluded to occurred. About the middle of the day, intending to take a walk, I went into the hall for my hat. His was there, and mine was not. I could not imagine what had become of it, but, as I could not walk without it, I returned to the library. After some time had elapsed, Mrs. Shelley came in and gave me an account, which she had just received from himself, of the visitor and his communication. I expressed some scepticism on the subject, on which she left me, and Shelley came in, with my hat in his hand. He said, 'Mary tells me you do not believe I have had a visit from Williams.' I said, 'I told her there were some improbabilities in the narrative.' He said, 'You know Williams of Tremadoc.' I said, 'I do.' He said, 'It was he who was here to-day. He came to tell me of a plot laid by my father and uncle to entrap me and lock me up. He was in great haste and could not stop a minute, and I walked with him to Egham.' I said, 'What hat did you wear?' He said, 'This, to be sure.' I said, 'I wish you would put it on.' He put it on and it went over his face. I said, 'You could not have walked to Egham in that hat.' He said, 'I snatched it up hastily, and perhaps I kept it in my hand. I certainly walked with Williams to Egham and he told me what I have said. You are very sceptical.'" Shelley then proposed that they should walk together the next day to the Turk's Head Coffee-House in the Strand, where Williams was stopping. Peacock agreed to this. So the next morning they set off; but had not got half-way down Egham Hill before Shelley suddenly turned round and said, "I do not think we shall find Williams at the Turk's Head." Peacock replied, "Neither do I." Peacock continues: "He said, 'You say that because you do not think he has been there, but he mentioned a contingency under which he might leave town yesterday, and he has probably done so.' I said, 'At any rate we should know that he has been there.' He said, 'I will take other means of convincing you. I will write to him. Suppose we take a walk through the forest.'" Some days afterwards Shelley said he had had a letter and an enclosure from Williams. Peacock replied that he would be glad to see the letter. Shelley said, "I cannot show you the letter; I will show you the enclosure. It is a diamond necklace." He also said that Williams had sent him the necklace to prove his identity and sincerity. Peacock replied, "Surely your showing me a diamond necklace will prove nothing but that you have one to show." "Then," said Shelley, "I will not show it you. If you will not believe me I must submit to your incredulity." And there the matter ended. Peacock tells us that once or twice before he had argued with Shelley against similar semi-delusions, "which had their basis in his firm belief that his father and uncle had designs on his liberty." We have seen already that he told a wild story of his father's plots to Godwin. That was almost certainly false, and the fact that he told it is a confirmation of this tale of Peacock's. Peacock was writing forty years after the event and may be wrong in some details; but he had no motive for inventing the whole story. If it is true in the main it is a curious instance of Shelley's delusions. We may be quite sure that Williams of Tremadoc, whether Shelley had seen him or not, knew nothing of the designs of Shelley's father. Twice at least before, Shelley had been threatened with mysterious dangers before leaving some place and had given these dangers as a reason for leaving. Each time there had been a suspicion that the dangers were imaginary, or had some very slight foundation in fact.

These three cases must have a cumulative effect in disposing us to believe that Shelley, when he wished to leave a place, was apt to find romantic reasons for doing so. He did not consciously invent them, but allowed the fancies on which they were based to settle in his mind. On points of this kind he was not perfectly sane, since he could not clearly distinguish between fact and fancy. But the insanity was only transient and occasional. It no more affected the general health of his mind than an occasional fit of indigestion affects the general health of the body. He worked his mind hard, and his mind suffered now and again from overwork; but his poetry proves that it was not diseased. Peacock tells us that he would discuss the truth of his own fancies with freedom and calmness, "with the good temper and good feeling which never forsook him in conversation with his friends. There was an evident anxiety for acquiescence, but a quiet and gentle toleration of dissent. A personal discussion, however interesting to himself, was carried on with the same calmness as if it related to the most abstract question in metaphysics. Indeed, one of the great charms of intercourse with him was the perfect good humour and openness to conviction with which he responded to opinions opposed to his own."

In May 1816 Shelley, Mary, and Claire started for Geneva. Claire had reasons unknown to the other two for going with them. She had wished to become an actress, and had called on Byron with the idea of getting an engagement at Drury Lane through his influence. Byron had seduced her, probably without much resistance on her part, for she, like Mary, had not been brought up to consider that marriage was an important addition to love. Byron also had started for Geneva, and she hoped to meet him there again. The party went to the Hôtel d'Angleterre at Sécheron, a suburb of Geneva. Byron arrived at the same hotel on May 25. He and Shelley had never met before; but Shelley had already a great admiration of his poetry. From the first he only half admired him as a man. "Lord Byron," he wrote to Peacock at the beginning of their acquaintance, "is an exceedingly interesting person;

and, as such, is it not to be regretted that he is a slave to the vilest and most vulgar prejudices, and as mad as the winds ? " To the end of his life he was half fascinated and half revolted by Byron, just as we now are half fascinated and half revolted by what we know of him. Byron and Shelley had this much in common that they were both more or less rebels and outcasts, and also this, that neither of them had another friend so nearly equal to himself in intellect and genius. Shelley had never met a man as great as Byron, and Byron had never been intimate with a man as great as Shelley. They could talk on equal terms, with the certainty that neither would be too dull to understand the other. Shelley always thought too highly of Byron's poetry ; and Byron, probably, always thought too meanly of Shelley's ; but each could see that the other was a great man. Byron was drawn to Shelley because, suspicious as he was, he knew that Shelley was perfectly disinterested, and that he could trust him better than he could trust himself. Other men might seek his acquaintance because he was the most famous poet in the world and because they wanted to share some of his notoriety if they could not share his fame. Shelley, he knew, wanted to get nothing from him or through him. He said, after Shelley's death, that he was the best and least selfish man he had ever known ; and even in Shelley's lifetime he, the most capricious and slanderous of men, seldom said a word against him. The two poets disagreed in many things. Shelley's opinions were as constant as Byron's were inconstant ; and often Byron would dispute with Shelley for the fun of it. Shelley was always in earnest, even when he would have been wiser to trifle ; Byron would trifle or pretend to trifle over the most serious matters. Shelley's nature was extraordinarily simple ; Byron's extraordinarily complex. Shelley could have explained the purpose of his life on a half-sheet of notepaper. Byron would have sworn that his life had no purpose. He seemed to live from hand to mouth, to change with every new experience, and to throw the whole force and richness of his nature into every passing whim. He did not lay much store by opinions, because he found it so difficult to get any settled opinions about life. He was an experimentalist without much system in his experiments. But Shelley seems to have been born with a consistent set of opinions ready made, upon which experience had but little effect. Shelley was scarcely conscious of his body at all. He conceived of himself as a pure spirit and sought everywhere for a spirit with a purpose like his own through all the irrelevant matter of the world. Byron was perfectly conscious of his body and would often let the flesh master him, using his mind only to heighten its pleasures and living like a sophisticated animal. In such moods he became a cynic, like the young Donne, pretending that all men would do as he did if they could get rid of their illusions and hypocrisies. Then even his fierce and abiding passion for the truth was perverted into a desire to prove that all men were always what he was at the moment. Then he would believe that all the nobler passions of men were as false as his own early sentimentalities. He never, like Shelley, grew out of these sentimentalities into a great lyric poet, nor found the reality of the emotions which he had feigned in his youth. Like most great men who are at war with themselves, he showed the fulness of his powers in a war with what he hated outside himself. The thwarted and embittered nobility of his mind expressed itself in invective. He would not trust himself, like Shelley, to spin dreams of what men ought to be; yet there was an ideal implied in his indignation against them for what they were. And Shelley saw this and forgave and admired him for it. It seemed to him that Byron, if he laughed sometimes at the angels, was always against the devils, and never the willing slave of the evil principle which he thought of as tyrannising over man. Shelley was very like those ecclesiastics to whom heresy is the sin of the devil and far less pardonable than all the sins of the flesh. He considered that Wordsworth had fallen into heresy and called him a pitiful wretch. Byron might talk wildly, but he did not support Tory candidates for parliament. He might sometimes even seem to have a leaning to superstition; but that was a mere weakness of the flesh, like his vulgar amours. He was not for the Church of England and the British Constitution at all costs. He was not a slave to fears of change, and no one could call him a sycophant to power. He always hated Castlereagh as well as Shelley himself, and was far happier in his abuse of him.

There was this great difference between Byron and Shelley, that Byron was born to be a man of action, and that his poetry was only a kind of safety valve for energies that he would have vented otherwise if he could. Whereas Shelley was born to be a poet, and in his actions was only trying to make his poetry come true. Byron could only get a little of himself into pure poetry, and that little he usually misrepresented. The whole force and variety of his nature went into those of his works that were between poetry and prose, and offered the widest possible range of expression to all his mixed and changing moods. But Shelley's nature was never fully realised except in pure poetry. Even his intellect could not thoroughly express itself in prose, and he thought most closely and powerfully in music. To be himself he needed to escape from action and all the compromise of reality. Peacock tells us that when he spoke under excitement his voice was sharp and dissonant, but that he had it under perfect command when he read poetry. Then it was low and soft, but clear, distinct, and expressive. There was the same difference in his writing. He had not a perfect command of his genius in controversy, or when there was any mixture of prose in his subject. When he disputed or attacked, his style was apt to be thin and harsh and strained. He was at ease only when he sang. It was a strange perversity that made Matthew Arnold praise his prose and his letters at the expense of his poetry. His prose is always fluent, indeed too fluent. Even when the ideas are original, the language is too full of generalities and borrowed rhetoric that make no mark upon the mind. Like many poets, he found it fatally easy to write prose, just because he could not put all his powers into prose. In prose he had the facility of the amateur ; but in poetry the intensity of the master. And it is the same with his letters. There is more fluency than character in them, for his character could only express itself in the speed and music of verse. But Byron was the best letter-writer of his time and one of the best that ever lived. He could put all his character into a phrase, so that we seem to hear him speaking as we read it. Shelley's letters are more like the essays of a brilliant schoolboy or girl than like natural speech. They are almost as full of generalities as his essays, and their best passages are pieces of eloquent description that seem to belong to an essay rather than to a letter. If Byron had never written a line of verse, his letters would still give delight to all who care for that kind of writing; but Shelley's letters and prose have only a kind of parasitic life upon his poetry; and even the "Defence of Poetry" would not have survived, I think, if it were not by the author of "Prometheus Unbound."

Shelley and Byron soon became intimate, and shared a boat together in which they spent many evenings on the lake. The Shelleys and Claire moved to a cottage about two miles from Geneva, and Byron went to the villa Diodati close by. In June they made a voyage round the lake, in the course of which Byron wrote the "Prisoner of Chillon." Soon after the voyage was over Shelley began to pine for home, and on July 17 he wrote to Peacock asking him to get him a house near Windsor Forest on a lease of fourteen or twenty-one years. Though always restless he was always desiring a fixed abode, and hoping to find a home where he could live for ever. Peacock gives a material explanation of his restlessness. In his own house, wherever it was, he says, Shelley was always a vegetarian, and fell out of health in consequence. When he travelled he would eat meat for convenience, and imputed his better health and spirits, not to the meat, but to the travelling. There may be some truth in this; but he could not be satisfied with any kind of reality for long, yet never lost the hope of finding a reality to satisfy him. Thus he never took root to the end of his days, and never knew the peace of a home or the economy of settled habits. At one moment he wrote to Peacock with delight of "the hissing of kettles, the long talks over the past and dead, the laugh of children, the warm winds of summer filling the quiet house, and the pelting storm of winter struggling in vain for entrance." At another he formed adventurous projects of descending the Danube in a boat, of visiting Constantinople and Athens, then Rome and the Tuscan cities, and returning by the South of France, always following great rivers ; the Danube, the Po, the Rhine, and the Garonne. Meanwhile he went with Mary and Claire to Chamouni, as a result of which he wrote his poem, "Mont Blanc," and collected seeds of rare Alpine plants to grow in an English garden. But the culture of Alpine plants was not understood then, and Shelley, so far as I know, did not become the first English rock-gardener. He called his poem on Mont Blanc an undisciplined overflowing of the soul ; and this is a just description of it. The ideas fade into each other too fast for the reader to grasp them. The poet's imagination is still vague and wandering, and his purpose is not yet clear even to himself. He is under the influence of Wordsworth ; but description and meditation do not enforce each other, nor is there ever a perfect fusion of them, as in Wordsworth's best poetry of the same kind. The opening is like a noble passage of Wordsworth, but it has not his imaginative precision. Shelley seems to be taking a flying shot at a fine idea and we cannot be quite sure whether he has hit or missed it.

> "The everlasting universe of things
> Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
> Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—
> Now lending splendour, where from secret springs
> The source of human thought its tribute brings
> Of waters,—with a sound but half its own,
> Such as a feeble brook will oft assume
> In the wild woods, among the mountains lone,
> Where waterfalls around it leap for ever,
> Where woods and winds contend, and a vast river
> Over its rocks ceaselessly bursts and raves."

Shelley was not yet the myth-maker he afterwards became, when clouds and the sun and wind and stars were living things to him, and he could write of them as other poets write of men and women. He was still inciting his imagination with metaphysics, and not quite sure whether the wonders of the earth and sky were interesting for their own sake or for what the human mind put into them.

He was metaphysical also in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" which was written about this time, and from which I have already quoted an autobiographical passage. In this poem he tries to explain the universe and himself to himself. It is a philosophic confession of faith, a little too vague and abstract, in spite of its eloquence, to be a masterpiece of poetry. There is always reason in fine poetry, but its main purpose is to express emotion. There is often emotion in philosophy, but its main purpose is to reason. In this poem Shelley is not quite sure whether his main purpose is to reason or to express emotion; and therefore it has no cumulative effect upon the reader's emotions.

The blank verse poem called "The Sunset," which was written before he left England, is remarkable for a careful and detailed passage of description:—

> "He walked along the pathway of a field
> Which to the east a hoar wood shadowed o'er,
> But to the west was open to the sky.
> There now the sun had sunk, but lines of gold
> Hung on the ashen clouds, and on the points
> Of the far level grass and nodding flowers
> And the old dandelion's hoary beard,
> And, mingled with the shades of twilight, lay
> On the brown massy woods—And in the east
> The broad and burning moon lingeringly rose
> Between the black trunks of the crowded trees,
> While the faint stars were gathering overhead."

This is a study in the manner of Coleridge and was probably written as an exercise in observation and expression. William Morris said, rather hastily, that Shelley had no eyes. He certainly took little pleasure as a rule in minute observation. Yet his impressions of nature are often very vivid. He seems to have taken them in with all his senses, not with the eye alone; and to have felt a life in things beyond what his senses could discover to him. And this life he reveals to us not only in the sense of his words, but in the very music of his verse, just as Beethoven reveals it in his "Pastoral Symphony." Dr. Garnett published a little fragment, probably written at this time, which is interesting because it expresses his longing for home:—

> "Dear home, thou scene of earliest hopes and joys,
> The least of which wronged memory ever makes
> Bitterer than all thine unremembered tears."

Besides the poems I have mentioned Shelley wrote but little verse in 1816. Indeed it was his most barren year since he had begun to write real poetry, and he never knew a year so barren again. But it was remarkable for the production of Mary's "Frankenstein," a work that got more immediate fame than any poem of her husband's, and is still remembered for its title and its monster even if it is not often read. It was the result of a conversation about ghosts and horrors after which Shelley suddenly ran shrieking out of the room. He said that he was looking at Mary and thought of a woman he had heard of who had eyes instead of nipples to her breasts. This took possession of his mind and horrified him. When he was recovered Byron proposed that each of the party should write a ghost story. Shelley kept pressing Mary to do this, and at last one night she hit upon the idea of Frankenstein and his Monster. The Shelleys and Claire started for England on August 28 and reached Portsmouth on September 9. Thence Shelley went to London to do business and find a house in the country, and Mary went with her children and Claire to Bath. At some time, probably on the journey home, the Shelleys had discovered that Claire was with child by Byron. They were not indignant at Byron's conduct. Probably, as Professor Dowden suggests, they supposed that Byron loved her. They were soon to find that he disliked her and had treated her as a mere instrument of his pleasure. This affair, with the years of misery which it brought to Claire and the many troubles it brought to Shelley and Mary, perhaps taught them that there was something to be said for marriage; that a woman who will not yield herself to a man without marriage has some protection against mere beasts of prey. Perhaps Shelley felt that his conduct and doctrines were responsible to some extent for Claire's seduction. He certainly was as kind a friend to her as any woman ever had; and, though Mary sometimes thought him more affectionate than he need be, there is no reason to believe a word of the scandals that were spread about them.

Claire wished to conceal her pregnancy from Godwin and her mother. At Bath she was known as Mrs. Clairmont, and soon Shelley, after staying with Peacock at Marlow, also came to Bath. In October they were horrified by the suicide of Fanny Imlay, the half-sister of Mary, which was probably the result of melancholia and not of love for Shelley, as Mrs. Godwin asserted. Mrs. Godwin, not unnaturally, disliked Shelley, and was apt to impute all calamities to him. He tried to be civil to her; but said that when he was obliged to dine with her he would "lean back in his chair and languish into hate;" so that she probably saw some artifice in his civilities.

While Shelley was at Bath his "Alastor" was reviewed by Leigh Hunt in the *Examiner*, together with poems by Keats and John Hamilton Reynolds. Hunt called Shelley a very striking and original thinker. They had met before, but now they became friends. Hunt was not a trustworthy critic, but if he sometimes took geese for swans he seldom fell into the far worse error of taking swans for geese. He saw that Keats and Shelley were great poets, when scarcely any one else had the wit to see this. He was justly reproached with being the head of the Cockney school, for he wrote about the country as if he had just discovered it in a day's outing; and no doubt he encouraged Keats in his early Cockneyfications. But Keats outgrew these and Shelley never caught them. He was used to the country from childhood and was too full of high purposes to babble of green fields. Indeed his defect was the other way. His purpose was apt to make him impatient of detail, and his earlier poetry is empty where Keats's is clogged. He learned nothing either good or bad from Leigh Hunt, and never had any connection with the Cockney school. He was drawn to Leigh Hunt mainly because Hunt was a liberal and a great enemy of injustice and prejudice. Unfortunately Hunt, like Godwin and other reformers whom Shelley admired, was constantly in want of money, and had no idea what to do with it when he got it. He got a good deal out of Shelley; but Shelley always gave so delicately and patiently that his debtors never became his enemies, and he was an eager benefactor of Hunt to the end of his life. In December 1816 he went to stay with Hunt at Hampstead. When he returned to Bath he received, on December 15, a letter from Hookham the publisher, telling him that Harriet had drowned herself in the Serpentine. We do not know when Shelley had last seen Harriet or heard from her. She had been corresponding with Peacock at the end of June, and seems then to have been in want of money, although she had £400 a year. In November Shelley was trying to find her and without success. She was living with her father and sister until a short time before her death; but she is said to have become the mistress of some man who deserted her, and to have been turned out of her father's home. She certainly left it and went to live in Queen Street, Brompton, while her children were sent to a clergyman in Warwick. On the night of November 9, when she had been a very short time in her new home, she went out and drowned herself in the Serpentine. Her body was not found until December 10.

We know very little of her history after Shelley had left her, so little that it would be useless to speculate about it. We cannot say how far Shelley was responsible for her suicide, or how far it was her own fault. The fact that she was always talking about suicide, even in her happiest days, makes it possible that she may have drowned herself without first suffering any very great agony of mind. But Shelley was certainly too ready to absolve himself of any responsibility for her death. He went up to London as soon as he heard of it and from thence wrote a letter to Mary which contained the following passages :—

"I have spent a day, my beloved, of somewhat agonising sensations, such as the contemplation of vice and folly and hard-heartedness, exceeding all conception, must produce. Leigh Hunt has been with me all day, and his delicate and tender attentions to me, his kind speeches of you, have sustained me against the weight of the horror of this event.

"The children I have not got. I have seen Longdill, who recommends proceeding with the utmost caution and resoluteness. He seems interested. I told him I was under contract of marriage to you, and he said that, in such event, all pretence to detain the children would cease. Hunt said very delicately that this would be soothing intelligence to you. Yes, my only hope, my darling love, this will be one among the innumerable benefits which you will have bestowed upon me, and which will still be inferior in value to the greatest of benefits—yourself. It is through you that I can entertain without despair the recollection of the horrors of unutterable villainy that led to this dark, dreadful death. . . . Everything tends to prove, however, that beyond the shock of so hideous a catastrophe having fallen on a human being once so nearly connected with me, there would in any case have been little to regret. Hookham, Longdill, every one does me full justice; bears testimony to the upright spirit and liberality of my conduct to her. There is but one voice in condemnation of the detestable Westbrooks. If they should dare to bring it before Chancery a scene of such fearful horror would be unfolded as would cover them with scorn and shame. . . . Remember my poor babes, Ianthe and Charles. How tender and dear a mother they will find in you—darling William, too! My eyes overflow with tears. To-morrow I will write again."

Thus it appears that Shelley had made up his mind very quickly and easily that the Westbrooks were altogether responsible for Harriet's death. How far they were we cannot tell; but in the Chancery suit for the possession of the children, which ensued, they were not covered with scorn and shame, as he confidently foretold; indeed nothing seems to have come out to their discredit. Eliza Westbrook in an affidavit referred to a letter which Shelley wrote to her after Harriet's death in which he spoke of Mary as the lady whose union with him she, Eliza, might excusably regard as the cause of her sister's ruin. He would scarcely have written thus if he had felt sure that Eliza herself and her father were the villains he made them out to be in this letter. Altogether it is not a pleasant document, and discovers Shelley at his worst. He seems to be thinking of himself more than of the dead wife who might have lived happily if he had been faithful to her. She has drowned herself and it is a hideous catastrophe; but it is some consolation that every one does him full justice. However, I do not believe that he did himself full justice in this letter. For once, I think, and for the moment his heart failed him. He did not dare to face the thought that but for him Harriet might still have been alive. He was indeed in a dreadful case. All his life he had lived in a romance of his own making and had persuaded himself that things were as he wished them to be. And here was a fact that he could not play with. Now indeed—

"Art and eloquence
And all the shows of the world were frail and vain"

against this sudden revenge of reality, a revenge which very few men could endure without flinching, without attempting to set up futile defences against it. In this letter Shelley is like a man feebly raising his arms to protect his head from the blow of a giant adversary. And then we must remember that he had to consider the feelings of Mary, who shared his responsibility. However ill he wrote or spoke of Harriet—he is said to have called her once a frantic idiot—there is no doubt that he was deeply moved by her death. The shock of it, like the shock of a railway accident, took time to show all its effects. Peacock and Leigh Hunt were sure that he suffered from it greatly. There are poems and snatches of poetry, written in 1816 and 1817, and even later, that seem to be wild with the horror of death, not of his own death, but of the death of others as he, a man yet alive, contemplated it. The first of these, of uncertain date, seems to refer directly to Harriet:—

"The moon made thy lips pale, beloved—
The wind made thy bosom chill—
The night did shed on thy dear head
Its frozen dew, and thou didst lie
Where the bitter breath of the naked sky
Might visit thee at will."

Here is another, dated by Mrs. Shelley November 5, 1817:—

"That time is dead for ever, child!
Drowned, frozen, dead for ever!
We look on the past
And stare aghast
At the spectres wailing, pale and ghast,
Of hopes which thou and I beguiled
To death on life's dark river."

This is more vague, but it seems to be full of half-formed thoughts of Harriet and her end. Again, there is this verse from a poem called "The Past," and written in 1818:—

"Forget the dead, the past? Oh, yet
There are ghosts that may take revenge for it,
Memories that make the heart a tomb,
Regrets which glide through the spirit's gloom,
And with ghastly whispers tell
That joy, once lost, is pain."

Other poems and passages of poetry go to prove that from this time forward Shelley's mind was haunted by ghosts as it never had been before, and subject to a real pain which made him think of his old imaginary pains as disguised pleasures. This was the end of his confident, unknowing youth. In his heart of hearts he could no longer think of himself as an innocent being free to make his own Paradise. The past had hold of him, and would not let him do what he would with the present or the future. He was not, like some men, burdened by a sense of his own sin or incessantly troubled by a desire to expiate it. He never had that kind of religion which makes a man feel that he is in debt, for his own misdoings, to the holy Author of life. His religion was concerned, like the religion of Crashaw, only with visions of a heaven which seemed to him to be his due, since he had conceived it. The religious passion in him was imperfect because it took no account of evil in himself, and only revolted against evil in others as an inexplicable perversity. He never knew evil and its function in life as the great saints know it from their knowledge of its workings in their own minds; and thus he could never reconcile himself to it, as they do, not mistaking it for good, but suffering it gladly in themselves and in others as a necessary phase in the everlasting training of the soul. His faith was always imperfect, subject to bewilderment and passing despair, because it did not take account of both good and evil, because he never knew that his soul needed training. Thus, when he was haunted by ghosts, he could not lay them with repentance, or by a change of heart free himself from the past. Like Lucifer, son of the morning, he would not disown himself. What he had been he still was and had a right to be. And so these ghosts and the disaster which bred them, and the blind pain which it set up in his mind, seemed to him to be forced upon him by an ugly mystery outside himself which he could only forget in dreams of a future delivered from it. If he had been aware of that ugly mystery inside himself he would have known better how to deal with it; and his dreams would have been of purification by his own effort and the help of all the struggling world, and of the power which guides that struggle. But he died at the age of thirty; and it would be unjust to expect of him, because of his divine powers, that wisdom which divine powers cannot give, but which only comes through human experience. It may come thus to men with no genius; and they, having it, may be tempted to think that a man with the genius of Shelley could only lack it through some peculiar wilfulness or folly. But light can blind as well as darkness; and Shelley was blinded to the nature of this life by the far-off light on which his eyes were always set.

Shelley had a strong desire to be a father at last to his children by Harriet. Very likely he tried to forget the past and his dead wife in the future of his living children. He wrote to Mary saying how tender a mother they would find in her; and she, like the good woman that she was, was eager to be a mother to them. But the Westbrooks contested his right to them; and meanwhile he determined to prove his faithfulness to Mary by an immediate marriage. They were married in London on December 30, 1816, after a reconciliation with Godwin. Shelley, writing to Claire, speaks of "the ceremony so magical in its effects," and says that Godwin has shown the most polished and courteous attentions to himself and to Mary. By this time Shelley had few illusions about Godwin's character, and said that he was not deceived by him. In Mrs. Godwin he saw nothing but affectation, prejudice, and heartless pride.

Shelley's children were in the care of a clergyman at Warwick. In January they filed, through their grandfather, John Westbrook, a bill of complaint to the Lord Chancellor, Lord Eldon, in which they stated that Shelley had deserted his wife to cohabit with Mary, and that ever since the desertion they had been in the custody of John and Eliza Westbrook; also that Shelley avowed himself an atheist, and in "Queen Mab" and other works had expressed his atheism blasphemously. They asked for an injunction against Shelley that he might not take possession of them, and that they might be placed under the protection of the Court of Chancery.

Shelley in his answer stated, among other things, that Harriet and he had separated by mutual consent, and that he had not deserted her; that he was very anxious to have the children under his own care, but left them with his wife at her urgent entreaty; and that, if since her death they had been under the protection of John Westbrook and Eliza, it was not with his consent.

The case was argued at great length, and Lord Eldon gave his judgment, on March 27, against Shelley, on the grounds both of his opinions and of his conduct. He granted an injunction and ordered a Master in Chancery to consider the question of the children's maintenance and education, and to suggest a suitable person to take care of them. There was some wrangling about this matter; but it was finally determined that they should be committed to the care of a Dr. Hume, of Hanwell, and that Shelley and the Westbrooks might visit them twelve times in the year.

Some writers on Shelley have seemed to be indignant at the Lord Chancellor's judgment, as if it were based not on law, but bigotry. It may be argued that the law was bigoted; but not, I believe, that Eldon perverted it to indulge his own bigotry. The Court of Chancery has always been very loth to interfere with the rights of fathers, and Eldon's respect for that court and all its precedents was enormous. The judgment filled Shelley with grief, apprehension, and rage. His children were as good as dead to him; and he had fears, which proved baseless, that his child by Mary would also be taken from him, and that he himself would be prosecuted for atheism and blasphemy. He expressed his rage fiercely enough in a poem of sixteen stanzas, addressed to the Lord Chancellor, whom he hated for his opinions as well as for his judgment in this particular case:—

"By thy complicity with lust and hate,
Thy thirst for tears—thy hunger after gold;
The ready frauds which ever on thee wait,
The servile arts in which thou art grown old.

. . . . . .

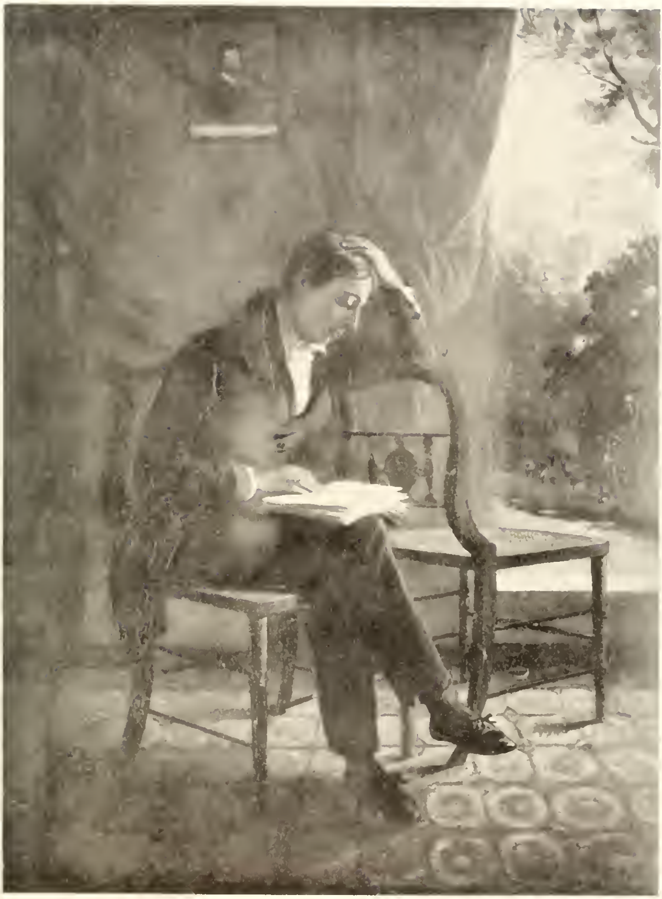
By all the hate which checks a father's love,
By all the scorn which kills a father's care—
By those most impious hands which dared remove
Nature's high bonds—by thee—and by despair—

Yes, the despair which bids a father groan,
And cry, 'My children are no longer mine—
The blood within those veins may be mine own,
But, tyrant, their polluted souls are thine;—'

I curse thee—though I hate thee not—O slave!
If thou could'st quench the earth-consuming Hell
Of which thou art a daemon, on thy grave
This curse should be a blessing. Fare thee well!"

Eldon was a man of great technical ability and enormous industry. Otherwise his mind was narrow and his character mediocre. He had prospered in the world as it was, and he did not want it altered. He had worked too hard all his life to have any ideas outside the law, or any ambitions except to be Lord Chancellor as long as possible and the friend of all powerful men. But he was conscientious and not altogether inhuman, and was held in great respect by the Bar. Many men besides Shelley cursed him, and he was not much troubled by their curses. The notorious delays of his court were the result not of villainy but of his extreme conscientiousness. To him the law was a game which he always played out to the bitter end.

On January 12, 1817, Claire was delivered of a daughter, afterwards called Allegra. While Shelley was in London, occupied with his case, he made many new acquaintances and among them Keats. Shelley and Keats never became great friends. They were very different in genius and character; and Keats, a man of humble birth and resolute independence, was probably anxious not to be thought a parasite of Shelley. He knew, no doubt, that Shelley was in the habit of giving money to his poorer friends, and he wished neither to be, nor to be thought, a pensioner of any man. No one could think less of distinctions of birth than Shelley; but he liked his friends to share his enthusiasms, and often chose them rather recklessly because they were of his own way of thinking. Keats was not. At this time of his short life he was almost narrow in his devotion to his art. Rightly and necessarily he



KEATS

FROM THE PAINTING BY JOSEPH SEVERN IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

was passing through a stage of growth in which he thought nothing in the world so important as making good verses. Shelley never passed through that stage and never was a pure artist. He always thought more of what he wanted to say than of his manner of saying it; and he advanced in his art more through the general growth of his mind, the increasing clearness of his ideas and strength of his emotions, than through any deliberate training. It was always subject that impelled him to write poetry; and he was always more or less at the mercy of his subject. When it mastered him he produced a masterpiece. When it did not he became vague and irrelevant. Keats at this time was casting about for subjects that he might exercise his art upon them. "Endymion" is a mass of irrelevancies; but these are often its greatest beauties. Shelley is usually at his worst when irrelevant. Thus the two poets did not understand each other. Keats thought that Shelley was not enough of an artist, that he composed too hastily to learn much from the exercise of composition. "An artist," he wrote to Shelley some years later, when Shelley had sent him "The Cenci," "must serve mammon; he must have 'self-concentration'—selfishness, perhaps. You, I am sure, will forgive me for sincerely remarking that you might curb your magnanimity, and be more of an artist, and load every rift of your subject with ore."

This was good advice, and was directed at the chief weakness in Shelley's poetry. He only escaped emptiness when most inspired. When not inspired he would run on in the hope of catching an inspiration; and he seldom revised or compressed those passages that were produced in a mere momentum. He was always an amateur to this extent, that he would not make a business of his art or labour at it against the grain. Luckily he was so often inspired that in his inspirations he learnt a great deal of what most other artists must learn by mere grinding. Strange as it may seem, he, the author of "Adonais," did not care much for any of Keats's poetry except "Hyperion." "His other poems," he wrote to Peacock, "are worth little," and though the "Hyperion" volume contained "Lamia" and the great "Odes," he said that, but for "Hyperion," it was insignificant enough. He seems to have thought that Keats had great genius, but possessed a wrong method of "system and mannerism." We may wish that the two poets had encouraged each other more at a time when both needed encouragement against the coldness of the world; but they were both too great to belong to a mutual admiration society.

Shelley also met Hazlitt, who did not like him. Hazlitt delighted in particular things but hated generalities. Shelley judged every particular thing by his generalities. He therefore seemed to Hazlitt to be the slave of generalities, and by them blinded to all the diversity and character and richness of life. Hazlitt despised him as a kind of revolutionary puritan, for whom ginger was never hot in the mouth and who would clear the world of all cakes and ale. He seems to have had no notion of Shelley's genius. There is an essay on "Paradox and Common Sense" in his "Table-Talk," written about 1821, which contains a description of Shelley far more damaging, because nearer to the truth, than the hysterical abuse of the *Quarterly Review*.

"The author of 'Prometheus Unbound,'" he says, "has a fire in his eye, a fever in his blood, a maggot in his brain, a hectic flutter in his speech, which mark out the philosophic fanatic. He is sanguine complexioned and shrill voiced. As is often observable in the case of religious enthusiasts there is a slenderness of constitutional *stamina* which renders the flesh no match for the spirit. His bending, flexible form appears to take no strong hold of things, does not grapple with the world about him, but slides from it like a river—

'And in its liquid texture mortal wound
Receives no more than can the fluid air.'

"The shock of accident, the weight of authority, make no impression on his opinions, which retire like a feather, or rise from the encounter unhurt through their own buoyancy. He is clogged by no dull system of realities, no earth-bound feelings, no rooted prejudices, by nothing that belongs to the mighty trunk and hard husk of nature and habit, but is drawn up by irresistible levity to the regions of mere speculation and fancy, to the sphere of air and fire, where his delighted spirit floats in 'seas of pearl and clouds of amber.' There is no *caput mortuum* of worn-out threadbare experience to serve as ballast to his mind; it is all volatile, intellectual salt-of-tartar, that refuses to combine its evanescent, inflammable essence with anything solid or anything lasting. Bubbles are to him the only realities: touch them and they vanish. Curiosity is the only proper category of his mind, and, though a man in knowledge, he is a child in feeling. Hence he puts everything into a metaphysical crucible to judge of it himself and exhibit it to others as a subject of interesting experiment, without first making it over to the ordeal of his common sense or trying it on his heart. This faculty of speculating at random on all questions may in its overgrown and uninformed state do much mischief without intending it, like an overgrown child with the power of a man. Mr. Shelley has been accused of vanity; I think he is chargeable with extreme levity, but this levity is so great that I do not believe he is sensible of its consequences. He strives to overturn all established creeds and systems; but this is in him an effect of constitution. He runs before the most extravagant opinions; but this is because he is held back by none of the merely mechanical checks of sympathy and habit. He tampers with all sorts of obnoxious subjects; but it is less because he is gratified with the rankness of the taint than captivated with the intellectual phosphoric light they emit. It would seem that he wishes not so much to convince or inform as to shock the public by the tenor of his productions; but I suspect he is more intent upon startling himself with his electrical experiments in morals and philosophy, and though they may scorch other people, they are to him harmless amusements—the coruscations of an Aurora Borealis, that 'play round the head but do not reach the heart.' Still, I could wish that he would put a stop to the incessant, alarming whirl of his voltaic battery. With his zeal, his talent, and his fancy, he would do more good and less harm if he were to give up his wilder theories, and if he took less pleasure in feeling his heart flutter in unison with the panic-struck apprehensions of his readers."

There are some strange errors in this description. Shelley, so far from being mastered by curiosity, had so little that his genius suffered from the want of it. He certainly did not wish to experiment on himself or the world to see what would come of it. The danger with him was that he was always too sure what would happen if he had his way. He may have talked sometimes to shock. Haydon, the painter, tells us that he once began a conversation at table with the words, "As for that detestable religion, the Christian"—but he was usually far too much in earnest when he wrote to think of shocking people. Nor was he captivated by the intellectual phosphoric light of obnoxious subjects. He was indeed one of the pure to whom all things are pure, and was always as free from any kind of prurience, even intellectual, as a healthy girl. But, these mistakes apart, the description would seem quite just to any one who had no belief in the reality of those ideals upon which Shelley's mind was set, and which it was the main purpose of his poetry to express. If there is no reality in them, no glory somewhere in the universe, either existing or to be, which Shelley at the height of his inspiration did, however imperfectly, comprehend and represent to us, then indeed the better part of his life was only absurd or heroic error, and the most extreme beauties of his poetry were mere caprices of fancy with nothing but irrational beauty to recommend them. This, strangely enough, was the view of Matthew Arnold. For him, apparently, poems like "Life of Life, thy lips Enkindle" had no relation to reality. They were mere irridescent bubbles, without any substance of human interest or experience. Unless we believe that Shelley had and expressed an understanding of the nature of things which he got by some process unknown to us, we shall make no more of his life and his poetry than Hazlitt made of them.

One can believe this, and yet think that he would not have made a good home-secretary, that he stumbled over realities about his feet because his eyes were fixed on realities far away. But those who think that his eyes were not fixed upon realities at all can only make nonsense of his life and his poetry.

Thornton Hunt, the son of Leigh Hunt, who was a child at this time, tells a touching story of Shelley's anxiety about his Chancery suit. Shelley would often play with him, and once, teasing him, provoked him to say that he hoped that he would lose the suit and have his children taken from him. "I was sitting on his knee," says Hunt, "and as I spoke he let himself fall listlessly back in his chair, without attempting to conceal the shock I had given him. But presently he folded his arms round me and kissed me; and I perfectly understood that he saw how sorry I was, and was as anxious as I was to be friends again." Leigh Hunt has a story of how Shelley found a sick woman in the snow at Hampstead one winter's night and carried her from door to door, being refused admission at one after another. At last he saw a carriage drive up to a house and an elderly man get out of it. He seized his opportunity and told his story, but the man refused his help. "Impostors swarm everywhere," he said, "the thing cannot be done. Sir, your conduct is extraordinary." "Sir," answered Shelley, "I am sorry to say that *your* conduct is extraordinary; and if my own seems to amaze you, I will tell you something which may amaze you a little more, and, I hope, will frighten you. It is such men as you who madden the spirits and the patience of the poor and wretched; and if ever a convulsion comes in this country (which is very probable), recollect what I tell you. You will have your house, that you refuse to put this miserable woman into, burnt over your head." The man only exclaimed, "God bless me, sir; dear me, sir," and hurried into his house. Hunt gave the poor woman shelter; and he and Shelley tended her, with the help of a doctor, so that she recovered.

Shelley could talk fiercely enough when provoked by the selfishness of the rich; but the common idea that he was an utterly reckless revolutionary in political matters is false. In this year he wrote a pamphlet called "A Proposal for putting Reform to the Vote," which, though expressed with some violence, only suggests that a meeting should be held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern "to take into consideration the most effectual measures for ascertaining whether or no a Reform in Parliament is the will of the majority of the individuals of the British nation," and that at that meeting certain resolutions should be proposed with the object of ascertaining this. Among these was a resolution to the effect that "This meeting disclaims any design, however remote, of lending their sanction to the revolutionary and disorganising schemes which have been most falsely imputed to the Friends of Reform, and declares that its object is purely constitutional." Shelley concludes by saying that he is in favour of annual Parliaments, but not of Universal Suffrage, which seems to him, "in the present unprepared state of public knowledge and feeling, a measure fraught with peril." He thinks that only those who pay a certain small sum in direct taxes ought to have the franchise. He does not believe that "the qualities belonging to a demagogue are such as are sufficient to endow a legislator," and he is not in favour of abolishing "the regal and aristocratical branches of our constitution" until the public mind "shall have arrived at the maturity that can disregard these symbols of its childhood."

The pamphlet is vague and not very practical in its proposals, but if Shelley held to-day the opinions expressed in it he would be almost a Conservative.

In February 1817 the Shelleys went to live at Marlow, taking a house of some size called Albion House. Claire, with her child, came to live with them. The child, which at present was called Alba, was given out to be the daughter of a friend in London, and Claire became once more Miss Clairmont. The summer of 1817 was hot, and Shelley's health prospered. He would often walk from Marlow to London with Peacock, thirty-two miles in a day, and without seeming tired at the end. "Delicate and fragile as he appeared," says Peacock, "he had great muscular strength." Professor Dowden quotes a description of him at this time from a letter written by a Miss Rose to Lady Shelley. "He was the most interesting figure I ever saw; his eyes like a deer's, bright but rather wild; his white throat unfettered; his slender, but to me almost faultless shape; his brown long coat with curling lambs' wool collar and cuffs, in fact his whole appearance, are as fresh in my recollection as an occurrence of yesterday. . . . Sometimes he was rather fantastically arrayed. On his head would be a wreath of what in Marlow we call 'Old man's Beard' and wild flowers intermixed; at these times he seemed quite absorbed, and he dashed along regardless of all he met or passed." He must have looked like Dionysus—not in his revels, but when wandering alone among the mountains in a spiritual rapture not induced by wine. We are reminded of his own description of himself in "Adonais":—

"His head was bound with pansies overblown,
  And faded violets, white, and pied, and blue;
And a light spear, topped with a cypress cone,
  Round whose rude shaft dark ivy tresses grew
  Yet dripping with the fresh noonday dew,
Vibrated, as the ever-beating heart
  Shook the weak hand that grasped it——"

It is natural to think of flowers in connection with him. Three different writers, in describing him, have compared him to a flower or a plant that—to quote again from his description of himself—

"Can scarce uplift
The weight of the superincumbent hour."

Medwin says that "He looked like an elegant and slender flower whose head drooped from being surcharged with rain." A writer in the *Edinburgh Review* (1824) says that "His form, graceful and slender, drooped like a flower in the breeze," and P. G. Patmore spoke of his figure as bending to the earth "like a plant that had been deprived of its natural air," and compared him to a flower that has been kept from the light of day.

But Shelley was not content to live beautifully like a flower. This was a time of bitter distress in England, and the lace-makers of Marlow, since they provided wares for an unstable luxury market, suffered as much as any class. Shelley, says Peacock, "went continually amongst this unfortunate population, and to the extent of his ability relieved the most pressing cases of distress. He had a list of pensioners, to whom he made a weekly allowance." One day he came home without shoes, having given them away to a poor man. Professor Dowden prints a bill of £17, 2s. for blankets, dated December 29, 1817. And he was kind to animals as well as men. He would buy cray-fish and have them put back in the Thames, as Leonardo would buy caged birds and set them free.

Towards the end of 1817 Shelley was again in poor health. In September he went to see a doctor in London, and the doctor recommended rest and change of air. Shelley was eager to go to Italy, but Mary doubted whether they could afford it, although she was very anxious to get rid of Claire's child, and indeed of Claire, if that were possible; for people had made up their minds that the child was Claire's, and had begun to wonder whether Shelley was the father of it. Mary was delivered of a girl, named Clara, on September 2; and in her weakness she was troubled with many anxieties while Shelley was away in London.

Shelley had vague ideas of raising money, and talked about *post-obits*. "These things," wrote Mary, "as you well know, are affairs of wonderful length, and, if you must complete one before you settle on going to Italy, Alba's departure ought certainly not to be delayed." "You have advertised the house," she continues, "but have you given Madocks any orders about how to answer the applicants? And have you yet settled for Italy or the sea? And do you know how to get money to convey us there, and to buy the things that will be absolutely necessary before our departure?"

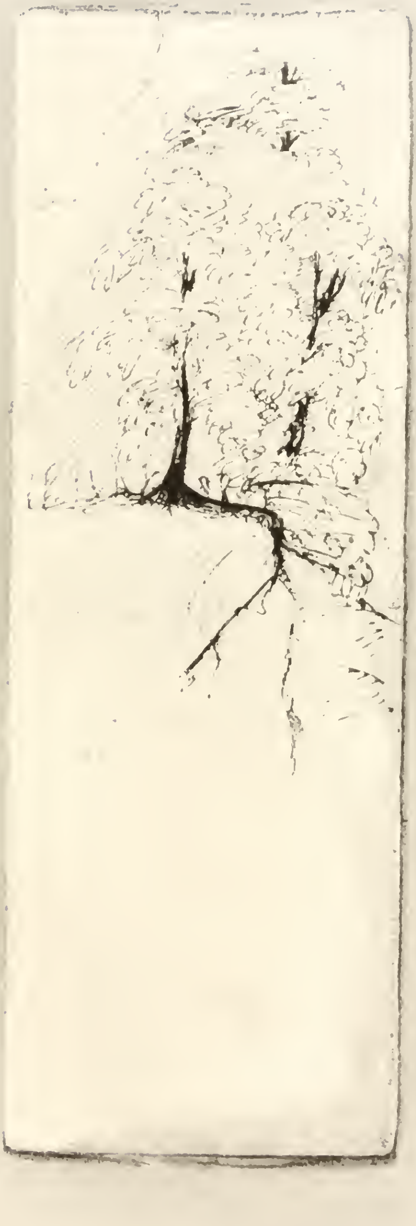
Shelley replied that they must go to Italy on every ground. He has borrowed £250, and could get £250 more from the same friend. As to the house, he wrote, "Let us look the truth boldly in the face. We gave, we will say, £1200 for the house. Well, we can get, if we like, £60 a year for the bare walls, and sell the furniture so as to realise £75 for every £100. This is losing scarcely anything, especially if we consider it in fact only so much money borrowed on *post-obits*, which in fact is cheaper than ever before." This does not sound very reassuring; but luckily Mary was not a mistress of finance, and very likely she was reassured. At any rate they settled to go to Italy, though they did not start until March 11, 1818.

CHAPTER IX

"THE REVOLT OF ISLAM" AND OTHER WORKS

NO doubt Shelley's bad health in the autumn of 1817 was partly caused by overwork, for in that year he had written as much poetry as would take ten years in the life of a less impetuous writer. "The Revolt of Islam" was begun in April, and finished on September 23. It is in twelve cantos, and contains nearly five thousand lines. In the summer Shelley was also writing "Rosalind and Helen," which he finished in Italy the next year. In the autumn and winter he produced the fragment, "Prince Athanase," but probably revised it in Italy. "The Revolt of Islam" was published on January 10, 1818; "Rosalind and Helen," with the "Lines written among the Euganean Hills," in 1819; and "Prince Athanase," in the "Posthumous Poems," in 1824. I will deal with all three works now.

"The Revolt of Islam" is intended to be a revolutionary epic. In his preface to it Shelley proclaimed his moral purpose. He sought, he said, "to enlist the harmony of metrical language, the ethereal combinations of the fancy, the rapid and subtle transitions of human passion, all those elements which essentially compose a poem, in the cause of a liberal and comprehensive morality." "For this purpose," he writes, "I have chosen a story of human passion," in its most universal character, diversified with moving and romantic adventures, and appealing, in contempt of all artificial opinions or institutions, to the common sympathies of every human breast." He adds that the poem is narrative, not didactic; but proceeds to give a long list of the lessons it is designed to teach. He



FACSIMILE OF A SKETCH MADE BY SHELLEY OUTSIDE THE FOLDED MS. OF 'THE ELYSIAN FIELDS'

then speaks of the sources from which the materials for the imagery of the poem have been drawn.

"I have trodden the glaciers of the Alps, and lived under the eye of Mont Blanc. I have been a wanderer among distant fields. I have sailed down mighty rivers, and seen the sun rise and set, and the stars come forth, whilst I have sailed night and day down a rapid stream among mountains. I have seen populous cities, and have watched the passions, which rise and spread, and sink and change, amongst assembled multitudes of men. I have seen the theatre of the more visible ravages of tyranny and war; cities and villages reduced to scattered groups of black and roofless houses, and the naked inhabitants sitting famished upon their desolated thresholds." In this preface too he separates himself from poets, like Wordsworth, who seemed to him too quick despairers of the future of man, because of the disappointments of the French Revolution. "The panic which, like an epidemic transport, seized upon all classes of men during the excesses consequent upon the French Revolution, is gradually giving place to sanity. It has ceased to be believed that whole generations of mankind ought to consign themselves to a hopeless inheritance of ignorance and misery, because a nation of men who had been dupes and slaves for centuries were incapable of conducting themselves with the wisdom and tranquillity of freemen so soon as some of their fetters were partiality loosened."

When he wrote this Shelley was wiser than Wordsworth, who, after his disappointment over the Revolution, became a complete reactionary in politics. But then Shelley was a babe in arms during the Terror, and had never gone through the bitter experience of Wordsworth.

Mrs. Shelley tells us that Shelley composed the poem in his boat as it floated under the beech-groves of Bisham, or during wanderings in the neighbouring country. It is written in Spenserian stanzas, a measure which Shelley thought inexpressibly beautiful, and which he adopted not because he considered it "a finer model of poetical harmony than the blank verse of Shakespeare and Milton, but because in the latter there is no shelter for mediocrity." In this he was wise. The poem is difficult to read as it is; in blank verse it would probably have been impossible. It cannot be called mediocre. Only a man of genius could have written it; but Shelley was not born a story-teller, and he had not taken much pains to become one. The story is lost among descriptions, so that the reader can scarcely follow it. The characters are mere abstractions, and one never wonders what will happen to them. Thus there is no cumulative force in the poem to compensate for its length, and the further one goes in it the wearier one gets. I confess that I should never have read it through for pleasure; nor can I believe that any one ever has, except perhaps Mary Shelley, to whom it is dedicated in some pleasant stanzas.

Shelley made up his own story, and showed but little of the story-teller's invention in the process. "The scene," he said in a letter to a publisher, "is supposed to be laid in Constantinople and modern Greece, but without much attempt at a minute delineation of Mahometan manners. It is, in fact, a tale illustrative of such a revolution as might be supposed to take place in an European nation, acted upon by the opinions of what has been called (erroneously, as I think) the modern philosophy. . . . It is a revolution of this kind that is the *beau ideal*, as it were, of the French Revolution, but produced by the influence of individual genius and out of general knowledge." The story does not begin until the second canto. The first contains an account of a fight in the air between an eagle and a snake, at the end of which the eagle flies away and the snake falls into the sea. On the shore there sits a woman, "beautiful as morning," who speaks to the wounded snake in its own tongue, and calls it to her. She addresses the narrator and asks him if he will dare to go "a voyage divine and strange," with her and the serpent. They set off in a "boat of rare device." She tells him that the eagle is the spirit of evil who had changed the spirit of good into a snake, and had then afflicted the earth with all its evils. But the war between the snake and the eagle still continues, and—

> "The Victor Fiend,
> Omnipotent of yore, now quails, and fears
> His triumph dearly won, which soon will lend
> An impulse swift and sure to his approaching end."

Then she tells her own story. How she had been moved by the French Revolution to sweet madness, and how in a dream she saw a wingêd youth, who told her that a spirit loved her, and asked her how she would prove her worth. How she went to Paris and "braved death for liberty and truth," and how she was still sustained by the spirit when her "hopes had lost the glory of their youth." The vessel proceeds swifter and swifter until they come to a wonderful temple, "girt by green isles." There—

> "Sate on many a sapphire throne,
> The great, who had departed from mankind."

The woman shrieks and vanishes, and there appears upon a throne, until now vacant, a form "fairer than tongue can speak or thought may frame." Then the narrator hears a voice—

> "Thou must a listener be
> This day—two mighty spirits now return,
> Like birds of calm, from the world's raging sea,
> They pour fresh light from Hope's immortal urn;
> A tale of human power—despair not—list and learn."

Then appear Laon and Cythna, the hero and heroine of the poem, and Laon proceeds to tell their story.

In this strange introduction Shelley shows an utter contempt or ignorance of the story-teller's art. The reader is perplexed at the outset, and his patience exhausted before the hero and heroine appear. Shelley tries to make a myth; but its significance is lost in descriptions, wonderful but vague. The introduction lacks substance, and there is the same fault all through the poem.

Laon was born "in Argolis beside the echoing sea," and there fretted against the tyranny of the Turk and resolved to destroy it. Cythna was an orphan who lived with his parents, his sole associate, and the sharer of his hopes. She is carried away by the Turks, and Laon kills three of them. He is bound to a column, on a rock above the town, and there left to die of thirst and hunger. But he is delivered by a hermit, drawn from Shelley's early friend, Doctor Lind, and taken away by sea to a tower of stone, where he remains for seven years while the hermit nurses him out of madness. Then the hermit tells him that "the tyrants in the Golden City tremble," for a maiden, who is of course Cythna, walks through it "veiled in virtue's adamantine eloquence," and has cast a spell over slaves and tyrants alike. A great host has assembled in the plain beneath the city's wall, and is trying to persuade the tyrant's guards to desert him with words of human love. The hermit exhorts Laon to go among them and uplift his charmêd voice. Laon goes, and reaches the plain at the moment when the guards of the tyrant have made a treacherous attack upon the patriot hosts. All is confusion; but, at the cry of Laon, "in sudden panic those false murderers fled." Laon, with his eloquence, prevents a massacre—

"And all
Seemed like some brothers on a journey wide
Gone forth, whom now strange meeting did befall
In a strange land, round one whom they might call
Their friend, their chief, their father."

They enter the city amid universal joy and find the fallen tyrant, who is spared through Laon's intercession and taken to "a home for his repose assigned." There follows a great festival of freedom round a vast altar, which "the devotion of millions in one night created." Upon an ivory throne sat a veiled woman, Cythna, or, as she was now called, Laone. Here we should expect a joyful meeting between her and Laon, but Shelley disappoints us of it. He will give us no human interest; but only a long ode from Cythna about freedom, which, in spite of many beauties, cannot be read without impatience, especially when

Cythna, after beginning a stanza magnificently, proceeds to preach vegetarianism—

> " My brethren, we are free. The fruits are glowing
> Beneath the stars, and the night winds are flowing
> O'er the ripe corn, the birds and beasts are dreaming—
> Never again may blood of bird or beast
> Stain with its venomous stream a human feast,
> To the pure skies in accusation streaming."

One need have no quarrel with vegetarians to see that after the first three lines it falls from poetry to rhetoric. The joy of the people does not last long. That very night the tyrant treacherously attacks them. Laon and a band of brothers gathered round him make a desperate stand, but all are killed except him, and he is overpowered ; when suddenly a black Tartarian horse of giant frame comes trampling over the dead, Cythna riding it and waving a sword, like an angel robed in white. The enemy flee. She tells Laon to mount, and they gallop away over the plain and come to a marble ruin on a mountain. Cythna explains her intervention thus—

> " Friend, thy bands were losing
> The battle, as I stood before the king
> In bonds. I burst them thus, and swiftly choosing
> The time, did seize a Tartar's sword, and spring
> Upon his horse, and swift as on the whirlwind's wing,
>
> Have thou and I been borne beyond pursuer,
> And we are here."

Where all is improbable, there is no need of explanations that only heighten improbability. Laon and Cythna forget public disasters in love, and Shelley forgets rhetoric in poetry—

> " Was it one moment that confounded thus
> All thought, all sense, all feeling, into one
> Unutterable power, which shielded us
> Even from our own cold looks, when we had gone
> Into a wide and wild oblivion

> Of tumult and of tenderness? or now
> Had ages, such as make the sun and moon,
> The seasons, and mankind their changes know,
> Left fear and time unfelt by us alone below?"

They pass two days without eating, and then Laon rides away in search of food. He comes to a ravaged village, of which there is a horrible description, and there meets a madwoman who shows him three piles of loaves, round which she had set in state a ring of cold, stiff babes. Laon takes some of the bread back to Cythna, and Cythna then tells him her story; how she had been subject to the violence of the tyrant, and then taken by an Aethiopian diver to a cave over the sea. There she had had a baby, of which Laon seems to have been the father, and which was taken away by the diver. Then her cave was destroyed by an earthquake, and she rescued by a ship, the crew of which were engaged in kidnapping women for the Turk. Cythna by her eloquence persuades them to set all the women free, and they come to Constantinople, where Cythna walks free from shame or fear, encompassed by the toilworn mariners and happy maidens. She then preaches freedom, and neither priestcraft nor bribery avail against her. The rest Laon knows.

But meanwhile all the tyrants of the earth had gathered to help their brother tyrant. Famine and plague follow massacre; and a priest says that the plague will not be stayed until a huge altar is built, and Laon and Cythna burnt upon it. The altar is prepared and a great reward offered for them. A stranger appears before the tyrant's throne, and says that he will betray Laon if only Cythna may be allowed to go to America.

> "Where, though with rudest rites, Freedom and Truth
> Are worshipped."

Shelley seems to have forgotten that there were slaves in the United States. The tyrant and the senate agree to the stranger's terms, and he tells them that he is Laon himself. He is placed upon the altar to be burned, when suddenly Cythna appears upon her Tartarian steed. The tyrant has scruples about breaking his oath, but the priest none; so Cythna is set on the pyre beside Laon, and they perish in the flames. But the story does not end here. Shelley carries it beyond the grave, so that he may the more completely express his dreams of a more perfect state of being. Laon and Cythna wake reclining—

"On the waved and golden sand
Of a clear pool, upon a bank o'ertwined
With strange and star-bright flowers, which to the wind
Breathed divine odour."

A boat approaches them with Cythna's child in it, now a plumêd seraph. They are all carried in the "divine canoe" down a mighty stream, "between a chasm of cedarn mountains riven," for three days and nights to a lake—

"Motionless resting on the lake awhile,
I saw its marge of snow-bright mountains rear
Their peaks aloft, I saw each radiant isle,
And in the midst, afar, even like a sphere
Hung in one hollow sky, did there appear
The temple of the spirit; on the sound
Which issued thence, drawn nearer and more near,
Like the swift moon this glorious earth around,
The charmed boat approached, and there its haven found."

So the poem ends. I have given this account of its story because none of my readers is likely to know it, and because in its very absurdity it shows the character of Shelley's mind, and the manner in which his genius developed. "The Revolt of Islam" is immature in everything except the versification. Shelley is already a master of the Spenserian stanza, which in "The Revolt of Islam" moves more swiftly than in the "Faerie Queene," and has a richer and more complicated music. Whatever he wants to say Shelley can say already with ease, and in the language proper to poetry; but there are two problems in the art of composition. A writer must not only be able to express himself; he must also know how to catch and hold the attention of his public. Shelley wrote "The Revolt of Islam" only to express himself, and without any thought of his public, for he had none. Throughout his life he suffered from the lack of that training which an artist can only get from addressing a public competent to judge of his art.

In his time, as in ours, there was no popular or predominant form of poetry, like primitive epics or the Greek and Elizabethan dramas, which a young poet of great powers would naturally attempt, and which would offer him a definite problem to solve. Thus the romantic poets were all forced to make experiments in form, more or less blind, and Shelley's longer poems were a series of such experiments, the results of which he had no means of testing, since very few read them and what notice they got was mainly vulgar abuse. "The Revolt of Islam" was a very blind experiment. Shelley wrote it to express his passion for freedom, his vast hopes for the future of man—whether in this life or another, his hatred of tyranny and war and priestcraft, his delight in the sympathy of beautiful women, and his pleasure in river and sea voyages.

In a good narrative poem the poet's main purpose is to tell his story. He chooses a story which he can tell naturally in poetry, and his poetry grows out of the telling of it. Shelley's story was nothing to him but a mere pretext for the expression of his ideas and emotions. He took no pleasure in telling it, and no pains to make it probable. It has been said that Shelley's poetry is too poetical, and certainly "The Revolt of Islam" is too poetical for a narrative poem; that is to say, the story is smothered by the poetry and sacrificed to the poet's tastes. Since he delighted in describing voyages, the poem is full of them; and they are introduced, not because they are probable, but that he may have the pleasure of describing them. In a story there should be some relation of cause and effect, otherwise it will not hold together. In "The Revolt of Islam" there is none. Events occur as Shelley chooses. They have no connection with each other or with the characters. Therefore they do not hold our attention. As for the hero and heroine, they are mere mouthpieces of the poet, expressing his opinions at length and on any pretext. A great narrative poem, like a great poetic play, has a cumulative power. The further we read in it the more we are moved by its poetry, for the sense of its heightened reality grows upon us with our interest in the characters and in the succession of events. In "The Revolt of Islam" there is no cumulative power, for it grows the more unreal the further we read in it. The emotions expressed in it seem to be causeless, since we can take no interest in the story which is supposed to excite them, or in the characters who are supposed to feel them. And at the same time we cannot enjoy the lyrical passages as we enjoy isolated lyrics, because they can only be explained by reference to the unreal and obscure story, whereas an isolated lyric explains itself or needs no explanation. They also lack the concentration of an isolated lyric, and are mixed up with rhetoric and attempts at narrative. Thus there is a vast deal of beautiful poetry lost and wasted in "The Revolt of Islam," as in most of the longer poems of the romantic movement. Sometimes the reader comes upon a magical line or two, such as—

> "Oh, what a might
> Of human thought was cradled in that night,"

or—

> "While far Orion o'er the waves did walk
> That flow among the isles."

Sometimes upon whole stanzas of extreme beauty—

> "I sate beside the steersman then, and gazing
> Upon the west, cried, 'Spread the sails! Behold!
> The sinking moon is like a watch-tower blazing
> Over the mountains yet; the city of gold
> Yon cape alone does from the sight withhold;
> The stream is fleet—the north breathes steadily
> Beneath the stars, they tremble with the cold!
> Ye cannot rest upon the dreary sea!
> Haste, haste to the warm home of happier destiny!"

Or this one, in which Laon thinks Cythna dead—

> "What then was I? She slumbered with the dead.
> Glory and joy and peace had come and gone.
> Doth the cloud perish when the beams are fled
> Which steeped its skirts in gold? or, dark and lone,
> Doth it not through the paths of night unknown,
> On outspread wings of its own wind upborne,
> Pour rain upon the earth? The stars are shown,
> When the cold moon sharpens her silver horn
> Under the sea, and make the wide night not forlorn."

But these passages delight as much apart from their context as in it. They prove that Shelley was a poet, but not that he was a great artist. "The Revolt of Islam," for all its beauties, is only an unsuccessful attempt made by Shelley to find a subject and a form suited to his genius. Later attempts were more successful, and no doubt he profited by the experience he got from this wonderful failure.

There is one circumstance in the history of the poem which deserves mention as an instance of the recklessness with which Shelley still revolted against the soundest opinions upon sexual matters, if only they were commonly held. He had got it into his head that incest was not wrong, and was resolved to express this strange opinion in his poem. He therefore made Laon and Cythna brother and sister. His publisher, Ollier, did not discover this until a few copies of it had been already issued (Peacock says only three). He then refused to publish it unless the cause of offence was removed. Shelley at first protested. "The public respect talent," he wrote, "and a large portion of them are already undeceived with regard to the prejudices which my book attacks." He was strangely ignorant of public opinion. But Ollier pointed out that only a few alterations and excisions would be needed, and Shelley consented to make them. The first title of the poem was "Laon and Cythna," and this, in the expurgated version, was changed to "The Revolt of Islam."

"Prince Athanase" was never finished; and what there is of it does not show much advance upon "Alastor." Mrs. Shelley tells us that it was to have much the same subject as that poem. Athanase seeks through the world the One whom he may love. He goes on a voyage, of course, and on the ship meets a lady who seems to him to be all that he desires. But he is deceived in her. She deserts him and he pines away and dies. "On his death-bed, the lady who can really reply to his soul comes and kisses his lips." In what we have of the poem very little happens. The old man Zonoras, the friend of Athanase, is very like the hermit in "The Revolt of Islam," and, like him, is drawn from Doctor Lind. Shelley in a note said, "The author was pursuing a fuller development of the ideal character of Athanase, when it struck him that, in an attempt at extreme refinement and analysis, his conceptions might be betrayed into the assuming a morbid character."

One feels that Shelley could not have made Athanase do anything. These phantoms of his own mind can never act; they can only feel, and he has no skill in inventing causes for their emotions. "Athanase" is written in *terza rima*, a difficult metre which Shelley was fond of, and which already he handled with great skill. It contains some good lines; but the subject was one which Shelley had already exhausted. Perhaps that was the real reason why he did not finish it.

Shelley himself thought little of "Rosalind and Helen" and only finished it to please Mary. Its ideas are very like those of "The Revolt of Islam"; but it is more concerned with some of Shelley's own particular grievances. Rosalind and Helen meet on the shores of Lake Como. They had been friends in girlhood; but Rosalind had broken off her friendship with Helen, because Helen had lived unmarried with a man named Lionel. Rosalind, however, had learnt charity through her own sorrows. As she stood on the altar stair with the man she loved, her father, returned from a distant land, interrupted the marriage, crying that the bridegroom was her brother. Afterwards she had made a loveless marriage with a rich man who turned out a cruel tyrant, and, dying, left a will in which he accused her falsely of infidelity and atheism, and gave instructions that, if she tried to see her children, they should inherit none of his money. Helen's lover, Lionel, had been a poet and revolutionary. There is nothing but the difference of name and circumstances to distinguish him from Laon. The disappointment of his revolutionary hopes, and the deceit of a woman he had loved, threw him into a decline; but he got new happiness from his love for Helen. However, the ministers of misrule seized upon and bore his chained limbs to a dreary tower because he had blasphemed against their gods. Helen dwelt beside the prison gate, and soon his foes released Lionel from penitence or fear. But Lionel was a dying man. They went together to Lionel's home, beside the hoary western sea. In a temple, built by Lionel's mother, Helen played to him on his mother's harp. He was drawn to her embrace, and died in her arms. Lionel left her great wealth in his will. But she was bereft of it all by the ready lies of the law.

> "But let me think not of the scorn,
> Which from the meanest I have borne,
> When for my child's beloved sake,
> I mixed with slaves to vindicate
> The very laws themselves do make."

Here Shelley was thinking of his own experience with Lord Eldon, and he was thinking of it when he described Rosalind as separated from her children on a false charge of adultery and atheism. Rosalind's estrangement from Helen was taken from the experience of Mary, who had lost a friend of her girlhood for the same reason.

The poem is a kind of tract in verse, and it is no easier to turn a tract into good poetry when its moral is unorthodox than when it is orthodox. "Rosalind and Helen" is as unreal as "Sandford and Merton." The story is a poor one and poorly told because it was invented, not for its own sake, but to prove the justice of Shelley's opinions. The poem is written in a curious mixture of narrative and dialogue, and in irregular rhyming verse. The more irregular parts are much influenced by "Christabel." Shelley was right to think little of "Rosalind and Helen." The task of writing it may have given him a disgust for didactic poetry, to which his genius was quite unsuited. From this time he seldom wasted his powers upon it, and they grew with wonderful rapidity. We may consider "Rosalind and Helen" as the last of his immature poems, or, at any rate, the last that cannot be taken seriously. It was finished in August 1818, and, in September, he began "Prometheus Unbound."

CHAPTER X

THE DEPARTURE TO ITALY

SHELLEY, Mary, and Claire, with their children, left England on March 11, 1818, Shelley never to return. As they went through the Mont Cenis Pass, Shelley sang—

> "How Heaven neglected is by men,
>   And gods are hung upon every tree!
> But not the more for loss of them
>   Shall this fair world unhappy be."

He said that the mountains were God's *corps de ballet*, and that the Jungfrau was Mademoiselle Milanie. They reached Turin on March 31, and Milan on April 4. They wished to live on Lake Como; and saw "a very nice house, but out of repair, with an excellent garden, but full of serpents." It is a wonder that Shelley did not take it at once. He thought meanly of the Italians at first sight. He said they had less character than the French; and that the women seemed a very inferior race of beings, with manners both prudish and coquettish, long features, and thin figures. From Milan Claire's daughter was sent to Byron, at Venice. He had taken a strong dislike to Claire, whom he had never loved, and was resolved that she should not keep the child. Claire parted with her daughter because, otherwise, she feared that Byron would do nothing for the child, and it had no prospects except from him. Byron, in taking the child from her mother, sinned against nature, and made his sin worse by defending it with odious cant. Shelley appears to have advised Claire not to give up the child. During the rest of its short life he did all he could for it and for Claire. She suffered cruelly, and had no rest from anxiety and longing until it was dead. This sad example of the evils that come from irregular connections should have convinced Shelley that marriage was not a mere tyrannical imposition upon mankind, but an attempt, however imperfect, to protect women and children from beasts of prey. But he never understood institutions that express men's sense of their own weakness, for he had no sense of his own. He always thought that it was the institution produced the evil, and that, if that were abolished, the evil would go with it.

On May 1 they left Milan for Leghorn, where they went to see a Mrs. Gisborne who was an old friend of Godwin, and had taken care of Mary in her motherless infancy. Mrs. Gisborne had seen much of the world ; she had some skill in music and painting, and had known Jeremy Bentham. Her first husband had been Willey Reveley, the architect, by whom she had a son, Henry Reveley, who became an engineer. Her second husband, John Gisborne, was described by Shelley as " a man who knows I cannot tell how many languages, and has read almost all the books you can think of ; but all that they contain seems to be to his mind what water is to a sieve." Mr. Gisborne's nose he described as quite Slawkenbergian. " It weighs on the imagination to look at it. It is that sort of nose which transforms all the *g's* its bearer utters into *k's*. It is a nose once seen never to be forgotten, and which requires the utmost stretch of Christian charity to forgive. I, you know, have a little turn-up nose ; Hogg has a large hook one ; but add them both together, square them, cube them, you will have but a faint idea of the nose to which I refer." Shelley's notion of fun was always quite primitive ; but, when he got hold of a joke, like a high-spirited child he did not quickly let go of it. The Shelleys became great friends with Mrs. Gisborne, though Shelley's feelings towards the family varied from time to time with some violence. He described Mrs. Gisborne as a sufficiently amiable and accomplished woman, but as the antipodes of enthusiasm. In 1820 he wrote her a famous letter in verse.

They stayed about a month in Leghorn, and on June 11, 1818, went to the Baths of Lucca, where they took a house. There, in the heat of the day, Shelley would bathe in a pool under a waterfall deep in a wood. He could write little poetry at this time; no doubt his mind was exhausted after the "Revolt of Islam," but he made his free and eloquent translation of the "Banquet of Plato." After this was done he finished "Rosalind and Helen," but rather as a task than because he was moved to complete it.

Meanwhile Claire was fretting about her child, for they had bad accounts of Byron's way of life in Venice. She persuaded Shelley to go with her to Venice that he might intercede with Byron, and they set out together in August, leaving Mary behind. They reached Venice on August 22. The child, now called Allegra, was with Mrs. Hoppner, the wife of the English Consul at Venice, who had offered to take care of her. Therefore they went to call on Mrs. Hoppner their first morning in Venice. They found her very kind, but she gave a bad account of Byron's way of living. Mrs. Hoppner, being a good woman, naturally sympathised with Claire's desire to have her child, and they discussed the best manner of approaching Byron. Since Byron had declared that if Claire came to Venice he would leave it at once, it was decided that he should be told that she was at Padua. Shelley went to see him at three in the afternoon. Byron received him well, and offered to let the child go to Claire to Padua for a week. He then took Shelley out in his gondola, though Shelley was anxious to get back with his news to Claire. They went to the Lido, and there rode on the sands. Byron had taken a villa called I Cappucini, at Este, among the Euganean Hills, and thinking that Mary and her children were with Claire at Padua, he offered to lend it to them for a time, and to send Allegra to Claire there. Shelley accepted the offer, and wrote to Mary asking her to come with the children to Este. "I have done for the best," he said, "and, my own beloved Mary, you must soon come and scold me if I have done wrong, and kiss me if I have done right." It was rash to take the two children across Italy at that hot season, but Mary set off on the last day of August. The baby Claire was teething, and, when they reached Este, was dangerously ill with dysentery. She continued to ail for some weeks, and there was no good doctor at Este, so they took her to Venice on September 24. The child grew worse and worse. At Fusina they were stopped because they had forgotten to bring a passport, but the soldiers could not resist Shelley's impetuosity. They reached Venice at about five o'clock, but the child died soon after. The Hoppners took them to their house, and Mary did not give way to her grief; but this was the second child she had lost, and she was soon to lose a third. They went up to Byron's villa early in October. There they had a beautiful view over the plain of Lombardy, with the Apennines in the far distance. They were all sad, and Shelley was ailing; but it was now that he began to write the poems upon which his fame is established.

We cannot tell how much the first sight of Italy had to do with this sudden advance in his powers. Very likely all this new beauty drew his mind away from themes that were not suited to his genius, and set him writing about what moved him most. The best passages in the "Lines written among the Euganean Hills" are those in which he speaks of Venice, which seemed to him a dead city, or worse than dead, with all her mouldering beauty enslaved by the Austrians. She will be a less drear ruin, he thinks, when she is deserted—

"And all is in its ancient state,
Save where many a palace gate
With green sea-flowers overgrown
Like a rock of ocean's own,
Topples o'er the abandoned sea
As the tides change sullenly.
The fisher on his watery way
Wandering at the close of day,
Will spread his sail and seize his oar
Till he pass the gloomy shore,
Lest thy dead should, from their sleep,
Bursting o'er the starlight deep,
Lead a rapid masque of death
Over the waters of his path."

The poem expresses a mood of grief, complicated and enriched by delight in the strange and half-unreal beauties of Italy. These beauties seem to belong to a land where no grief ought to be, and fill the poet with the desire for a state of mind accordant with them. At the end his longing for an earthly Paradise expresses itself, as so often in his poetry—

> "Other flowering isles must be
> In the sea of life and agony:
> Other spirits float and flee
> O'er that gulf: even now, perhaps,
> On some rock the wild wave wraps,
> With folded wings they waiting sit
> For my bark, to pilot it
> To some calm and blooming cove,
> Where for me, and those I love,
> May a windless bower be built,
> Far from passion, pain, and guilt,
> In a dell 'mid lawny hills,
> Which the wild sea-murmur fills,
> And soft sunshine, and the sound
> Of old forests echoing round,
> And the light and smell divine
> Of all flowers that breathe and shine."

The poem would be the better for more concentration and purpose. Shelley had not yet learnt, as Keats advised him, to load every rift with ore. But he had never before written with such precision and simplicity of language, or in so long a poem kept himself free from mere rhetoric.

Shelley and Mary returned to Venice on October 12, and Shelley was shocked at what he saw of Byron's profligacy. They were back at Este on October 24. The poem "Julian and Maddalo," written, perhaps, between his two first visits to Venice, is another advance upon his earlier work. Shelley would not, like many young poets, teach himself the art of poetry by choosing old themes and treating them in the manner of great masters. He tried to write in his own way about his own subjects. There is a common belief nowadays that all young poets, and indeed all young artists, ought to choose their own subjects out of their own experience, and treat them in their own way. The trouble is that young artists lack experience both of life and of their art. It is difficult for them to find subjects out of their own experience at all, still more difficult for them to find subjects that are suited to their talent; and most difficult of all, perhaps, for them to hit upon the right treatment of such subjects when found. Shelley, all through his short life, was hampered by all these difficulties, though less and less as time went on. To the end of his days his small experience of life often betrayed itself in the vagueness of his subjects; and when he chose a subject that was not vague in itself, it often proved to be unsuited to his genius. He took the subject of "Julian and Maddalo," partly out of his own experience. The best of it is a record of his impressions of Venice, and of conversations between himself and Byron. But impressions and conversations strung together do not make a coherent poem, and Shelley could not find a subject to which they were naturally relevant and subordinate. After a wonderful description of a sunset seen from the Lido, we have some eloquent conversations between Byron and Shelley; and these lead up to the account of a maniac, in a madhouse upon an island, whom they visit. He is one of Shelley's conventional heroes, like the youth in "Alastor," and Laon, and Lionel. He had held Shelley's opinions, had lost all his wealth, and had been driven mad by the faithlessness of a lady who came with him from France. Two hundred lines of the poem are taken up with his speech, which contains many beauties, but is vague and incoherent. No doubt a madman's speech would be vague and incoherent, but that is a reason why it should not be versified at length. And he does not speak like a madman, but like a young poet crossed in love and out of conceit with life.

Thus "Julian and Maddalo" is a formless work, but particular passages deserve the praise they have received. When Shelley writes out of his own experience he shows a new power of being, familiar but not prosaic. In his introduction he says that the more serious conversation of

Count Maddalo (Byron) "is a sort of intoxication; men are held by it as by a spell." In the poem he gives us snatches of this conversation glorified by his own art, but not emptied of character and reality. They have heard the bell in the madhouse tower calling the lunatics to prayer, and Julian, who is Shelley himself, says—

"'As much skill as need to pray
In thanks or hope for their dark lot have they
To their stern Maker. . . .'"

Byron lives for us in what follows:—

"'Oh, ho!
You talk as in years past,' said Maddalo.
''Tis strange men change not. You were ever still
Among Christ's flock a perilous infidel,
A wolf for the meek lambs—if you can't swim,
Beware of Providence.' I looked on him,
But the gay smile had faded from his eye.
'And such,' he cried, 'is our mortality,
And this must be the emblem and the sign
Of what should be eternal and divine!
And like that black and dreary bell the soul,
Hung in an heaven-illumined tower, must toll
Our thoughts and our desires to meet below
Round the rent heart, and pray—as madmen do;
For what? they know not,—till the night of death,
As sunset that strange vision, severeth
Our memory from itself, and us from all
We sought, and yet were baffled.'"

The poem gives us Shelley's impressions of Byron and Venice, and it proves that he was able to record such impressions vividly and swiftly. The versification is very original and skilful. The sense overflows the couplets as in the Elizabethan and Jacobean poets, but it seldom rambles on or loses itself in helpless mazes after the manner of the Caroline heroic poems and "Endymion." Shelley now began to show a new power of writing tersely, of saying things easy to remember; and this poem contains one of the few familiar quotations that come from his works:—

> "Most wretched men
> Are cradled into poetry by wrong,
> They learn in suffering what they teach in song."

In the preface to the poem Shelley describes himself thus: "Julian is an Englishman of good family, passionately attached to those philosophical notions which assert the power of man over his own mind, and the immense improvements of which, by the extinction of certain moral superstitions, human society may be yet susceptible." This is a just account of both the strength and the weakness of his ideas. When he asserted the power of man over his own mind, he, like all the children of light, fought against mechanical explanations of the Universe and all the complaisant tolerance of evil which they encourage. But he was too apt himself to find mechanical explanations of evil in what he called moral superstitions. Beliefs, which he did not share, seemed to him to be imposed upon men by some malign power outside them. They had but to rebel against that power to be wise and free at once. He did not see that such beliefs have grown with men's minds, and express both their strength and their weakness, all the truth and error that they have learnt from secular experience. Therefore he was content to describe himself as "a complete infidel, and a scoffer at all things reputed holy." He did himself a gross injustice, for that faith of his in the power of man over his own mind was the mastering principle of his life, and being the true faith, it grew in him and led him on towards the understanding of all subsidiary truths. Day by day he grew less content with his negative dogmatism and that mechanical explanation of evil which he got from the philosophers of the eighteenth century. For, since his main principle was right both in life and in art, he learnt truth and not error from experience. His errors came from the lack of it, and, though he died a youth, he had lived long enough to assure us that he had in him the secret of life and growth.

Shelley had been full of the idea of "Prometheus Unbound" ever since he came to Italy, and at Este he began it. The first act was written there in September and October. At the beginning of November the Shelleys decided to go south for the winter, and "Prometheus" was not continued till the spring. They reached Rome on November 20, but only stayed there a week. Shelley was most impressed by the Coliseum, and began a romance about it, eloquent but vague, which he never finished. It is written as if it ought to be in verse, like most of Shelley's more imaginative prose. On November 27 Shelley went to Naples alone to get lodgings; the others followed the next day. A Calabrian priest shared his carriage and was terrified at the thought of banditti; but when they reached Naples, and the priest was safe, he saw a youth murdered before their eyes with cheerful indifference. "I never felt such an inclination to beat any one," said Shelley. At Naples, they had trouble with an Italian servant, Paolo Foggi, who robbed them and seduced their son's nurse, Elise. Mary, who had learned, perhaps, from her own experience and Claire's that freedom might be harder for women than marriage itself, behaved in this emergency like a British matron and had them married at the English Church before she dismissed them. The man afterwards tried to blackmail Shelley with a threat of lying charges, and his slanders were a great trouble to both Shelley and Mary, as we shall see. Mrs. Shelley tells us that at Naples Shelley suffered much both from bad health and from melancholy. This melancholy was expressed in the first of his shorter poems, which is commonly considered a masterpiece, the "Stanzas written in dejection near Naples." We read such poetry, not for its sadness, but for its beauty. Vague melancholy, vaguely expressed, interests no one but the young who suffer from the same complaint and enjoy their suffering. What interests us in these stanzas, and in other poems of the same character, is the conflict between melancholy and delight, and the troubled music that comes of it. If melancholy were unopposed and unmixed there could be no music, for no one could express such melancholy in music. There must be some delight in the expression of whatever is expressed in terms of beauty.

"Yet now despair itself is mild,
Even as the winds and waters are;
I could lie down like a tired child,
And weep away the life of care
Which I have borne and yet must bear."

Here the sense is all melancholy, but not the sound; and the sound of poetry expresses an emotion which may, almost unknown to the poet, be in conflict with the sense.

About this time Shelley wrote two fragments of poems, "The Woodman and the Nightingale," and "Mazenghi," in which, so far as they go, the story is a mere pretext for descriptions, and which were abandoned, perhaps, because he lost interest in them when he had described what he wanted to describe. A passage about the nightingale's song reminds one of the long-drawn raptures of Crashaw and Swinburne:—

"The folded roses and the violets pale

Heard her within their slumbers, the abyss
Of heaven with all its planets; the dull ear
Of the night-cradled earth; the loneliness

Of the circumfluous waters,—every sphere
And every flower and beam and cloud and wave,
And every wind of the mute atmosphere,

And every beast stretched in its rugged cave,
And every bird lulled on its mossy bough,
And every silver moth fresh from the grave

Which is its cradle—ever from below
Aspiring like one who loves too fair, too far,
To be consumed within the purest glow

Of one serene and unapproachèd star,
As if it were a lamp of earthly light,
Unconscious, as some human lovers are,

Itself how low, how high beyond all height
The heaven where it would perish!—and every form
That worshipped in the temple of the night

Was awed into delight, and by the charm
Girt as with an interminable zone,
Whilst that sweet bird, whose music was a storm

Of sound, shook forth the dull oblivion
Out of their dreams."

If Shelley had made of this passage a simple lyric about the nightingale's song, it would have been famous. As he worked it into a story which he scarcely began, and which would probably have been as unreal as most of the other stories of his invention, it is but little known. But it is a healthy sign in a young poet when he can thus expatiate, and squander his fancy, and be drawn far away from an imposed theme by a chain of his own images.

"Mazenghi" is the beginning of a story of a Florentine exile. There is nothing to prove that Shelley would have made anything of it. But it contains a most fanciful description of the exile's doings at the edge of a poisonous marsh:—

"And the marsh-meteors, like tame beasts, at night
  Came licking with blue tongues his veinèd feet;
And he would watch them, as, like spirits bright,
  In many entangled figures quaint and sweet,
To some enchanted music they would dance—
Until they vanished at the first moon-glance."

Both here and in the nightingale poem Shelley is beginning to express that sense, which he possessed beyond all poets, of a humanity in all beautiful things, as if they felt the significance of their own beauty and through that beauty were communicating with each other and with him. For him, indeed, the upper air and the whole universe burst into life, and seemed as full of significance as a beautiful human being seems to the rest of us.

On February 28, 1819, the whole party left Naples for Rome, which they reached on March 5. Shelley now began to make a serious study of pictures and sculpture. Great artists are often poor judges of another art, and there is nothing remarkable in Shelley's criticisms. He thought that Michelangelo had no temperance, no modesty, no feeling for the just boundaries of art; and, strangest of all, no sense of beauty, for which reason hell and death were his real sphere. He had the admiration of his time for Guido Reni; but if he saw more in Guido's art than there really is, we probably see less. Wonder has been expressed at his admiration for Salvator Rosa, but Salvator is often admirable. There have been preserved some notes of his on sculpture in Rome and Florence. These consist mostly of descriptions, often very precise and minute. The most interesting is a note headed "An Accouchement; a bas-relief," which is a very close description of the Tornabuoni relief in the Bargello at Florence, attributed, probably wrongly, to Verrocchio. Shelley was merely amused by the naïveté of the relief, which is supposed to represent the death of Lucrezia Tornabuoni in childbirth; and describes it with some humour. He does not know what the subject may be. "What they are all wailing at," he says, "I don't know; whether the lady is dying, or the father has ordered the child to be exposed: but if the mother be not dead, such a tumult would kill a woman in the straw in these days." The other relief, representing the presentation of the child to the widower, seemed to Shelley "altogether an admirable piece, quite in the spirit of the comedies of Terence." Yet it is meant to be, and is, a pathetic scene. Shelley was used to find pathos only in the works of a later school; but he noticed the realism of this more archaic art, and was enough interested in it to describe it minutely. He was disgusted with Michelangelo's Bacchus. "Its countenance is the most revolting mistake of the spirit and meaning of Bacchus. It looks drunken, brutal, and narrow-minded, and has an expression of dissoluteness the most revolting. . . . It is altogether without unity, as was the idea of the deity of Bacchus in the conception of a Catholic. On the other hand, considered merely as a piece of workmanship, it has great merits. . . . As a representation of the Greek deity of Bacchus it wants everything." The Bacchus is a very wonderful work, but it represents him as the god of wine, a child of the earth drowsed with its richness. To Shelley he was pure spirit, just as the earth itself in his poetry loses its heaviness and substance and seems almost as unsubstantial as the clouds.

The chief part of his time now was given up to the composition of "Prometheus Unbound." "The poem," he says in his preface, "was chiefly written upon the mountainous ruins of the Baths of Caracalla, among the flowery glades and thickets of odoriferous blossoming trees which are extended in ever-winding labyrinths upon its immense platforms and dizzy arches suspended in the air." In a letter to Peacock he gave a beautiful and more elaborate description of the place, "overgrown with anemones, wallflowers, and violets, whose stalks pierce the starry moss, and with radiant blue flowers, whose names I know not, and which scatter through the air the divinest odour, which, as you recline under the shade of the ruin, produces sensations of voluptuous faintness like the combinations of sweet music." These sensations were expressed in the music of the poem, which is full of scents of flowers and that innocent voluptuousness which the unjaded senses of Shelley felt so keenly.

Shelley's son, William, was not suited by the heat of Italy. On June 2 he was taken ill with a gastric attack, and, on June 7, he died. This was the third child Mary had lost, and none remained to her. She was again pregnant, but therefore only suffered more. This calamity made an end of her youth, and she never recovered the spirits and confidence of youth. After her last child was born she was constantly filled with apprehensions for him. But he fortunately lived and prospered under her ceaseless care. He gave her hopes as well as fears in her early widowhood, and, after a life of trouble, she enjoyed at last a few years of rest and happiness in the protection of his love.

Shelley, too, suffered much from the loss of his child. But he had his art, for he was born to be a poet. Mary was born to be a mother, and for a time her occupation seemed to be gone. Shelley could soothe his grief with beautiful fancies. It was some little consolation to him that the child should be buried in that flowery English cemetery that had pleased him when he first went to Rome.

"Where art thou, my gentle child?
  Let me think thy spirit feeds,
With its life intense and mild,
  The love of living leaves and weeds
Among these tombs and ruins wild;
  Let me think that through low seeds
Of the sweet flowers and sunny grass,
Into their hues and scents may pass
  A portion——"

The poem breaks off there, perhaps because his loss pressed in upon his mind and cut it off from all escape into fancies. There are other fragments written this year about the child's death; and two in which he laments the manner in which Mary was secluded from him by her grief:—

"My dearest Mary, wherefore hast thou gone,
And left me in this dreary world alone?
Thy form is here indeed—a lovely one—
But thou art fled, gone down the dreary road
That leads to sorrow's most obscure abode;
Thou sittest on the hearth of pale despair,
                                        Where
For thine own sake I cannot follow thee."

It was an evil time for both of them, but most evil for Mary. Real life is very different from our sentimental notions of it. We should expect a divine poet, the kindest of men, and his wife, the best of women, to be drawn more closely together by the loss of their only son. But a divine poet has a great work to do; no grief can long distract him from that; and he looks to his wife to help him in it. Nothing, however, for a while can distract her from her grief. She cannot give him that help which he has learnt to expect from her. All the wife in her is lost in the mother's longing. Therefore their loss estranges them instead of bringing them together; and not through their own fault so much as through the different laws of their being. Nature herself, in such a case, seems the enemy of happiness. For the time she works against the companionship of man and woman through the very difference of sex upon which that companionship is based. But often we can turn nature from an enemy into a friend again by understanding her. If we are merely shocked and panic-stricken when life turns out to be unlike our sentimental notions of it, we shall be always at the mercy of circumstance.

Shelley at this time was scarcely twenty-seven, and still full of sentimental notions. He did not understand either his own nature or the nature of woman. Thus it must often have seemed to him that Mary was altogether lost to him, and that all his married happiness was lost with her. She had been mother as well as wife to him, and now she was neither. There is no doubt that he was deeply troubled in mind, though never, so far as we know, vexed into unkindness. But during all these months his genius was at its height; and in November a son was born to Mary, and nature again became her friend. "Poor Mary begins (for the first time)," Shelley wrote, "to look a little consoled, for we have spent, as you may imagine, a miserable five months."

A few days after the death of William they had left Rome for Leghorn, no doubt that Mary might have the companionship of Mrs. Gisborne. They took a villa outside Leghorn for three months. At this time Shelley considered "Prometheus Unbound" to be finished in three acts. The last act, which he wrote a few months later, was an after-thought. But his mind was not exhausted by that act of creation. In the spring of 1818 he had read a manuscript account of the story of Beatrice Cenci, and, when he went to Rome, he was ready to find all that he looked for in the famous picture which is supposed to be a portrait of her and the work of Guido Reni. "There is a fixed and pale composure upon the features," he wrote. "She seems sad and stricken down in spirit, yet the despair thus expressed is lightened by the patience of gentleness."

He also discovered that "the story of the Cenci was a subject not to be mentioned in Italian society without awakening a deep and breathless interest." On May 14 he had begun to write a tragedy on the subject. He now continued it at Leghorn. He tried to interest Mary in its progress, and talked it over with her day by day. He also wrote to Peacock for suggestions; but they arrived too late to be followed, and he told Peacock that he would not have followed them in any case. The rough draft of the play was finished on August 8. The fair copy was made before the end of the month, and an edition of 250 copies was printed at Leghorn for the sake of cheapness. The books were sent to England, and published by Ollier in the spring of 1820. "The Cenci" had a larger sale than any other of Shelley's works except, perhaps, "Queen Mab," and went into a second edition, which was printed in England, in 1821.

It is often supposed that Shelley had no love of his native country. This is not so. He pined for it from time to time, and, while at Leghorn, wrote to Peacock that he wished most devoutly he were living near London and particularly at Hampstead. "All that I see in Italy—and from my tower window I now see the magnificent peaks of the Apennines half enclosing the plain—is nothing; it dwindles into smoke in the mind when I think of some familiar forms of scenery—little, perhaps, in themselves—over which old remembrances have thrown a delightful colour." Now that Mary was wrapped up in her grief he longed to see his English friends. "Social enjoyment," he wrote, "in some form or other, is the alpha and omega of existence." On September 30 the Shelleys left Leghorn for Florence, and travelling slowly, because of Mary's condition, reached Florence on October 2. Shelley studied art again, and wrote a rapturous poem on the Medusa in the Uffizi that used to be attributed to Leonardo. The poem is better than the picture, a skilful but sensational work. At this time Shelley wrote the first of those lyrics which, by almost universal consent, have made him the greatest English lyrical poet. The "Ode to the West Wind" "was conceived and chiefly written in a wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence, and on a day when that tempestuous wind . . . was collecting the vapours which pour down the autumnal rains. They began . . . at sunset with a violent tempest of hail and rain, attended by that magnificent thunder and lightning peculiar to the Cisalpine regions."

Those who cannot by any power of art be wrought upon to share, even for a moment, Shelley's delighted sense of the significance of natural forces, will find in the "Ode to the West Wind" itself only a swarm of fancies swept along in a stream of entrancing music. It has been said that Shelley was a myth-maker. His myths were not to him mere caprices of fancy. They expressed, by the only means which human language provides for the expression of such things, that sense, which he possessed, of a more intense reality in nature than is to be felt by other men.

I speak vaguely, but I can do no better; for Shelley himself could only express it by means of images and music, and what he expressed loses most of its sense—and nearly all of its power to convince—when it is said in general terms and in cold prose. But I will make the attempt to do this. We are all conscious of a more intense reality in ourselves than in other people, and in human beings than in anything not human; and the nearer anything comes to humanity, the more conscious we are of its reality and of a significance in its qualities or powers like that which we find in our own. To most of us, then, the forces of nature have but little reality. To many, especially in modern times, they seem to be mechanical; and even when they manifest themselves in beauty, there are some who enjoy that beauty only with the senses and without any notion that it has more significance than a display of fireworks. But for Shelley these forces had as much reality as human beings have for most of us, and he found the same kind of intense significance in their manifestations of beauty that we find in the beauty of human beings or of great works of art. The nature of this significance he could not explain—no one can explain the ultimate significance of anything; but he could express it with enormous power in his art, and with a precision of statement which seems miraculous when the nature of his subject matter is considered. Shelley's poetry is often called vague, and his weaker poems are vaguer than they need be. But his finest lyrics are more lucid and exact than any other poetry of the same kind. There is this difference between Shelley and primitive myth-makers—that they seem to have thought of the forces of nature as disguised beings more powerful than themselves but still in all essentials human, or else as manifestations of the power of such beings. But to Shelley the west wind was still a wind, and the cloud a cloud, however intense a reality they might have for him. In his poetry they keep their own character and do not take on human attributes, though their own qualities may be expressed in imagery taken from human beings. When he addresses the west wind thus—

"Thou on whose stream, 'mid the steep sky's commotion,
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,

Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread
On the blue surface of thine aëry surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head

Of some fierce Mænad, even from the dim verge
Of the horizon to the zenith's height,
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge

Of the dying year, to which this closing night
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,
Vaulted with all thy congregated might

Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst: oh, hear!"

Then we are not wrought upon to feel anything human in the wind's power; we are not persuaded to believe in a new Favonius. But, if we are susceptible to Shelley's magic, we are filled with a new sense of the life and significance and reality of nature. Notice, too, that Shelley gives us no picture here. The poem is scarcely more fit to be illustrated than a piece of music; and it is much nearer to music than to painting, being so full of sound and motion. Yet it gives us a more vivid sense of experience than we could get from any pictorial description. The metre, which is *terza rima* divided into short periods, is managed with complete mastery. No one has ever made the ordinary heroic line move so swiftly as Shelley, and here, as the lines rush through a complicated system of rhymes, they express the irresistible power of the wind; and the music of each period is varied as if with sudden changes of instruments in an orchestra. After the diverse and clashing sounds of the period I have quoted, there follows one that opens like a new theme played upon violins—

> "Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams
> The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
> Lulled by the coil of his crystalline streams,
>
> Beside a pumice isle in Baiæ's bay."

No English poet had produced a piece of verse equal to this ode since Milton.

The beautiful "Indian Serenade" also belongs to this time. We cannot doubt that Shelley meant to imitate Moore in it. He thought Moore a better poet than himself. If Mozart's "Don Giovanni" had been composed in imitation of Rossini, the result would not have been more surprising. But genius can get its inspiration from inferior art as well as from nature, and Shelley, trying to sing like Moore, sang like himself instead.

Mary Shelley tells us that Shelley at this time had the idea of publishing a series of poems adapted expressly to commemorate the wrongs of the people. "He believed that a clash between the two classes of society was inevitable, and he eagerly ranged himself on the people's side." The year before he had called Wordsworth "a pitiful wretch" in a letter to Peacock, and he was determined that all the poets should not seem indifferent to the dreadful condition of the English poor. Now he feared lest anarchy should be "the last flash before despotism." There was, indeed, a danger that England would submit to the most ignominious of all despotisms, that of a plutocracy. Shelley saw this while Wordsworth and Scott, in their honest but sentimental Toryism, did not. The poems which Shelley wrote at this time to express his political opinions seem to me better than most pieces of the same kind. They may appear to us exaggerated, but we are too young to know what England was like in 1819. Then it was not absurd to speak of the "death-white shore of Albion, free no more," for the English people seemed to be falling into an economic slavery worse than any political oppression, and the British Constitution had been corrupted into a mockery of itself. Shelley speaks of this economic slavery in his "Song to the Men of England," and one verse at least is direct and strong :—

"The seed ye sow, another reaps;
The wealth ye find, another keeps:
The robes ye weave, another wears;
The arms ye forge, another bears."

The longest of these political poems is the "Masque of Anarchy." Shelley wrote it on hearing the news of the Manchester massacre. It is, Mrs. Shelley says, in a more popular tone than usual; but, though the language is simple, it is too full of generalities for a popular audience. Shelley was too young, too little acquainted with hard realities, and too vague in his ideals, to write this kind of poetry as William Morris wrote it. Addressing Liberty he says :—

"Science, poetry, and thought
Are thy lamps; they make the lot
Of the dwellers in a cot
So serene, they curse it not."

This is a bald and general statement. Morris, treating the same theme, particularises as if he knew the ideal state of which he dreamed. He asks what wealth there shall be when there is an end of plutocracy, and answers :—

"Nay, what save the lovely city,
And the little house on the hill,
And the wastes and the woodland beauty,
And the happy fields we till;

And the homes of ancient stories,
The tombs of the mighty dead;
And the wise men seeking out marvels,
And the poet's teeming head.

And the painter's hand of wonder,
And the marvellous fiddle-bow,
And the banded chorus of music:
All those that do and know."

In this poem there is long and noble experience and love of the best things we have, out of which Morris hoped the state of the future would be made. Shelley's poem is not quick with experience, and he speaks with no passion for existing noble things. He is fluent and sometimes eloquent, but not inspiring.

In October he wrote "Peter Bell the Third"—more a satire on Wordsworth than a parody of his poem. Shelley was angry with Wordsworth because he had become a reactionary in politics. Mrs. Shelley tells us that no man admired Wordsworth's poetry more, but he thought that a poet who lost all the high hopes of his youth must be infected with dullness. The poem, Mrs. Shelley says, was written as a warning. It was a true prophecy. Wordsworth did become the dullest writer that had ever been a great poet.

"Peter Bell the Third" is too long, but it is by far the most interesting of Shelley's lighter poems. The idea is good, and some of the verses have a curious wit, as in this hostile account of Wordsworth's attitude towards nature :—

"But from the first 'twas Peter's drift
To be a kind of moral eunuch:
He touched the hem of nature's shift,
Felt faint,—and never dared uplift
The closest, all-concealing tunic.

She laughed the while, with an arch smile,
And kissed him with a sister's kiss,
And said—"My best Diogenes,
I love you well—but, if you please,
Tempt not again my deepest bliss."

Shelley apparently had the idea that Wordsworth now only wrote well when inspired by Coleridge. Under his influence, he says, Wordsworth produced poetry—

"Like gentle rains, on the dry plains,
Making that green which late was gray,
Or like the sudden moon, that stains
Some gloomy chamber's window-panes
With a broad light like day."

Here is a description of the hostile review of Wordsworth's poetry, which is drawn from real reviews of Shelley's own:—

"By that last book of yours we think
You've double-damned yourself to scorn;
We warned you whilst yet on the brink
You stood. From your black name will shrink
The babe that is unborn."

The last remark had actually been made by a reviewer about Shelley; but he was always indifferent to such abuse.

In December 1819 Shelley began a prose work, called "A Philosophical View of Reform." The unfinished first draft of this has been preserved. Shelley saw that England was in danger of falling under the tyranny of a plutocracy. The National Debt seemed to him the great symbol of that tyranny. It was indeed true that rich men who had profited by the war had lent some of their profits to the

Government for the purpose of carrying on the war, and that the interest on their loans was now being paid directly or indirectly by multitudes whom the war had impoverished. Shelley had a vague scheme for lessening the burden of the National Debt on the many and its profit to the few. There can be little doubt that if he had lived now he would have been a Socialist, and probably a Fabian, for in political matters he was not a violent revolutionary. He was still opposed to Universal Suffrage and thought vote by ballot too mechanical. He was doubtful about Woman's Suffrage.

At the end of 1819 he wrote the last act of "Prometheus Unbound," and I will now say what I have to say of that work and "The Cenci."

CHAPTER X

"PROMETHEUS UNBOUND" AND "THE CENCI"

IN "Prometheus Unbound" Shelley attempted to make one of the great poems of the world. It is the most ambitious poem of the Romantic Movement, and one of the most ambitious that ever was written. The very vastness of the poet's ambition produced beauties that could not have been in a humbler and more perfect work; but no poet, however great his genius, can achieve a masterpiece in the highest kind of poetry unless all circumstances conspire to favour him. Circumstances did not favour the romantic poets so much as to allow any one of them to produce one of the great poems of the world. Both the epic and the dramatic forms were dead when the Romantic Movement began; no efforts availed to bring them to life again, nor was any new form of poetry created in which all the romantic ideas and emotions could find a complete and coherent expression. Forms of this kind are imposed upon the poet rather than created by him, and they are imposed by a public that regards poetry as one of the ordinary pleasures of life. We may suppose that listening to epic poetry was such a pleasure to the audience of Homer. The later Greeks and the Elizabethans certainly enjoyed poetry in their plays, while, at the same time, they expected those plays to interest and excite them. Thus Homer and Æschylus and Shakespeare were popular entertainers as well as great poets, and a task was imposed upon them by their public besides the task which they chose to make for themselves. But no such task was imposed upon the romantic poets, nor could they create a popular demand for any of the great forms of poetry. It is true that the narrative poems of Scott and Byron had a large sale; but nothing great was developed out of them, and Scott soon turned to prose, while Byron in "Don Juan" used poetry to make game of itself, just as Mr. Bernard Shaw sometimes uses the drama to make game of itself. Other romantic poets had higher ambitions, and tried to adapt the epic or the drama to their own purposes. But there was no purpose outside themselves to direct their adaptations. They were in the case of an architect who should set to work to design a great building without a commission or a site. He might imagine conditions for himself; but they would not enable him to develop a form, as the forms of the great Gothic Cathedrals were developed by all the conditions, material and spiritual, that were imposed on their builders. Thus when Wordsworth started to write the "Excursion" or the "Prelude" he had no one to please but himself, no difficulties to overcome except those which he chose to make. He had to set his own problem, and, naturally, he set one that was too easy. He was not subject to that external constraint by which alone the great forms of art can be developed; and so the "Prelude" and the "Excursion" are formless, their beauties casual and disconnected, their inspiration at the mercy of the poet's whims.

So it was with Shelley when he wrote "The Revolt of Islam," and it is most wonderful that, when only a year later he wrote "Prometheus," he should have produced a poem so much better in form. For the difficulties of "Prometheus" were enormous. The subject is one that would not suit any form of poetry that has ever been devised, and when Shelley treated it as a lyrical drama he only did so because all other forms were clearly impossible. His purpose was to express his sense of the present evil conditions of the universe, to represent a sudden miraculous change in that condition, and finally to sing the glory of the universe thus transformed. He had learnt too much about his art to treat this subject as he had treated it in "Queen Mab." He had done with sermonising fairies and magic tours through the past and future. He saw that he must express it in a myth; but, since there was no existing myth that suited his purpose, he had to make one for himself. The two chief characters in his myth have familiar names; but the story, as he tells it, is mainly his own invention. Æschylus, besides his "Prometheus Bound," wrote a lost play upon the liberation of Prometheus; but, as Shelley says in his preface, "the 'Prometheus Unbound' of Æschylus supposed the reconciliation of Jupiter with his victim as the price of the disclosure of the danger threatened to his empire by the consummation of his marriage with Thetis." This story would not have suited Shelley's purpose at all. "I was averse," he says, "from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the champion with the oppressor of mankind. The moral interest of the fable . . . would be annihilated if we could conceive of Prometheus as unsaying his high language, and quailing before his successful and perfidious adversary."

Shelley compares his Prometheus to the Satan of "Paradise Lost"; but he deliberately makes his arch-rebel his hero, gives him all the virtues, and ends the poem with his triumph. Thus his myth is of a new kind, and made to express the new ideas of an age of revolution. But men can form new ideas of the universe much more quickly than they can make new myths to express them; and for a poet not only to treat a myth in poetry, but also to invent the myth itself, is a task of almost insuperable difficulty. The great myths express, not one man's experience of life, but the experience of multitudes and generations. Shelley's myth expressed only his own rather limited experience and his own peculiar ideas, which were not so much the result as the cause of that experience. He seems to have been born with an overpowering desire for perfection, and an idea of it by which he tested all real things and found them wanting. It was never his object to reconcile himself to reality. Reality seemed to him to suffer from an organic disease of which it must be miraculously cured before he could consent to it. This idea of things he expressed in his myth. Prometheus represents all that is good in suffering humanity; Jupiter the tyrannous and external evil by which humanity is oppressed. Jupiter is suddenly and mysteriously overthrown, and Prometheus is freed. At once the universe is cured of its disease, and all things rejoice in common. This myth does not express any general conception of the nature of things; for the great mass of men, however little they may think about the order of the universe, have a sense that evil is in the nature of man and to some extent his own fault, not imposed upon him by a celestial tyrant. Men have tortured their minds with trying to discover the origin of evil; but even the most despairing have seldom imputed it to the tyranny of a god, at least not since they have developed moral ideas and got some mastery over nature. Nor have they entertained the notion that the universe might be freed at a stroke from a celestial tyranny. Ideas of the millennium are usually based upon a belief that mankind will some day purge themselves of their guilt or be forgiven by God. Now men will accept a myth which expresses their own conception of the universe, even if it explains nothing. But they are not likely to accept one which is contrary to their own conception, unless it not only expresses but explains. Shelley's myth, of course, explains nothing. How could it? He assumes the wickedness of Jupiter and the goodness of Prometheus. But Jupiter's wickedness has no motive, and his overthrow is causeless. Something happens in the middle of the play; but Shelley cannot tell us what it is, because he does not know. Demogorgon appears and descends with Jupiter into the abyss; but we do not learn why he appears or how he contrives the fall of Jupiter, or even who he is, except that he is Eternity and the child of Jupiter, as Jupiter of Saturn.

The names of Jupiter and Prometheus are familiar to us, but we are not accustomed to think of them as personifications of evil and good. Therefore Shelley could make little or no use of whatever tradition had gathered round them, and he was forced to insist always upon the qualities with which he had chosen to invest them. Here he was at a great disadvantage compared with Milton, who, in "Paradise Lost," was not bound to be for ever describing the wickedness of Satan since that was taken for granted, and who could therefore insist rather upon his ruined splendour and perverse courage. Shelley's Jupiter had to be wicked or nothing; and he has no qualities except wickedness.

But Shelley knew nothing about wickedness. To him it was an arbitrary mystery. Therefore he was quite content to represent it as arbitrarily overthrown. In his simple, passionate view of life something must happen, sooner or later, to change the nature of things. Like an early Christian, he looked forward to the millennium; but not being one of an expectant community, nor living in an age of creative faith, he had to make his vision of the millennium out of his own single imagination. There were no widespread rumours or prophecies, no general confidence, to which he could appeal. Even the most visionary appeals of his time were made to men to emancipate themselves by revolutions of their own contriving. Shelley's intellect could concern itself with political processes, but his imagination could not be fired by them; that was drawn into a desire for perfection and a sudden supernatural abolition of all evil, and it rushed past all consideration of the means by which this could come about to a contemplation of perfection itself. Indeed, his imagination, naturally religious, was logical in its disregard of the means of deliverance. Since he conceived of evil as imposed on man by a supernatural tyranny, a supernatural revolution was necessary for his deliverance.

Now the drama is a means of representing action, and in Shelley's myth there is no action. A poet who would represent something in action must have some knowledge of what he represents. Shelley had no knowledge either of the nature of evil, or of the means by which evil can be abolished; therefore he could not represent either. Matthew Arnold, following Aristotle, says in his preface to his poems of 1853 that all representations based on knowledge are interesting. "What is not interesting is that which does not add to our knowledge of any kind; that which is vaguely conceived and loosely drawn; a representation which is general, indeterminate, and faint, instead of being particular, precise, and firm."

It is certain that Shelley's attempts to represent action in "Prometheus" do not add to our knowledge, and that they are not interesting. Demogorgon was to him a mere symbol of the unknown; and he remains a mere symbol to us, as bare of all associations as an algebraic X. But I can best show how much the poem lacks action by a short account of it.

In the first act Prometheus is discovered bound to a precipice in the Indian Caucasus. There are no events except that the curse is repeated which long ago Prometheus had uttered against Jupiter, and which now, purified by suffering, he would recall; also that Mercury, with the Furies, comes to Prometheus, asks him to tell his secret and make submission to Jupiter, and, when he refuses, sets the Furies loose upon him. The Furies torture him with tales of how all the good in the world is perverted to evil; and then give place to a chorus of Spirits "whose homes are the dim caves of human thought," and who sing of what in human life is prophetic of the good that is to be.

In the second act there is still less action. Prometheus does not appear at all. The chief characters are Asia and Panthea, who, with a third, Ione, are described in the *Dramatis Personæ* as Oceanides. It is difficult to distinguish between them, except that Asia is the lover of Prometheus, and mourns for him in exile in a vale in the Indian Caucasus, where the first scene of the second act takes place. To her comes Panthea and tells of a dream in which she had seen Prometheus transformed by love, and in which he had murmured Asia's name. Asia looks into the eyes of Panthea, and sees in them Prometheus transformed as in Panthea's dream. Then another dream of hers appears, which she had forgotten, and calls on them to follow it. The dream passes into Panthea's mind and then into Asia's. In it—

"A wind arose among the pines; it shook
The clinging music from their boughs, and then
Low, sweet, faint sounds, like the farewell of ghosts,
Were heard: O, follow, follow, follow me!"[1]

They hear echoes crying, "Follow, follow," and pursue them, passing into a forest intermingled with rocks and caverns. Here the second scene of the act takes place, with wonderful songs of Spirits, and with a dialogue between two young fauns about the nature of those Spirits. Following the echo Asia and Panthea come to the cave of Demogorgon, which they enter, summoned by a song of Spirits. There they see

"A mighty darkness
Filling the seat of power, and rays of gloom
Dart round, as light from the meridian sun,
Ungazed upon and shapeless; neither limb,
Nor form, nor outline."

This is Demogorgon, and, in answer to their questions, he tells them that God made the living world and all that it contains. They ask him "who made terror, madness, crime, remorse?" And he answers, "He reigns." "Jove is the supreme of living things." And yet "All Spirits are enslaved that serve things evil." Therefore Jove must be a slave. When they ask who is his master, Demogorgon replies—

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[1] There is a passage in the first section of Tennyson's "Princess" so like this one that the likeness cannot be a mere coincidence:—

"A wind arose and rushed upon the south,
And shook the songs, the whispers, and the shrieks
Of the wild woods together; and a voice
Went with it, 'Follow, follow, thou shalt win.'"

No doubt Tennyson unconsciously remembered Shelley's lines. He has not improved them. Fifteen lines further on he has an image—

"But bland the smile that, like a wrinkling wind
On glassy water, drove his cheek in lines,"

which seems to be remembered from Shelley's "Prince Athanase":—

"O'er the visage wan
Of Athanase a rippling atmosphere
Of dark emotion, a swift shadow, ran,
Like wind upon some forest-bosomed lake,
Glassy and dark."

But here the remembrance is not so certain as in the first case, for there is less likeness in the wording.

"If the abysm
Could vomit forth its secrets. . . . But a voice
Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless;
For what would it avail to bid thee gaze
On the revolving world? What to bid speak
Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change? To these
All things are subject but eternal Love."

Asia then asks when the destined hour of the deliverance of Prometheus will come. Demogorgon shows her the Hours, wild-eyed charioteers driving rainbow-winged steeds. There is one Spirit with a dreadful countenance. Asia asks what it is, and it replies—

"I am the shadow of a destiny
More dread than is my aspect: ere yon planet
Has set, the darkness which ascends with me
Shall wrap in lasting night heaven's kingless throne."

The Spirit ascends his chariot, and drives off among the stars, "blackening the night."

Another Spirit appears with "the dove-like eyes of hope," and, for chariot, an ivory shell inlaid with crimson fire. He carries Asia and Panthea away with him, and the next scene finds them on the top of a snowy mountain. The Spirit tells them that the sun will not rise till noon. Apollo is held in heaven by wonder, and light is flowing from Asia. Panthea looks at her, and sees that she is changed.

"I scarce endure
The radiance of thy beauty. Some good change
Is working in the elements, which suffer
Thy presence thus unveiled."

Then a voice is heard in the air singing that most wonderful song, "Life of Life, thy lips enkindle!" And

Asia replies with the lyric, "My soul is an enchanted boat." So the act ends.

The third act opens in Heaven. Jupiter is seated on his throne. He exults in his secure omnipotence. Hitherto only the soul of man has rebelled against it. But now he has begotten a strange wonder—

"Who waits but till the destined hour arrive,
Bearing from Demogorgon's vacant throne
The dreadful might of ever-living limbs
Which clothed that awful Spirit unbeheld,
To redescend and trample out the spark.

This is his child by Thetis, whose incarnation he now expects. The car of the Hours approaches, and he hails its approach with cries of victory. But there descends from it Demogorgon himself. Jupiter asks him what he is, and he replies—

"Eternity. Demand no direr name.
Descend, and follow me down the abyss.
I am thy child as thou wert Saturn's child;
Mightier than thee: and we must dwell together
Henceforth in darkness."

Jupiter, after a brief defiance, cries for mercy; but in vain, and the two together—

"Sink on the wide waves of ruin,
Even as a vulture and a snake outspent
Drop, twisted in inextricable fight,
Into a shoreless sea."

In the next scene there is a short dialogue between Apollo and Ocean, in which Apollo tells of the fall of Jupiter, and Ocean, in beautiful lines, says that she will no longer be vexed with tempests. In the third scene Prometheus is unbound by Hercules in the presence of Asia, Panthea, Ione, the Earth and other Spirits. Prometheus tells how he will spend his happiness with Asia, and orders the Spirit of the Hour to travel round the world in her car, sounding the music of deliverance. The Earth says that henceforth all her children shall live in happiness together—

> "Night-folded flowers
> Shall suck unwithering hues in their repose:
> And men and beasts in happy dreams shall gather
> Strength for the coming day and all its joy:
> And death shall be the last embrace of her
> Who takes the life she gave, even as a mother
> Folding her child, says 'Leave me not again.'"

Asia asks whether the dead cease to love and move, and breathe and speak. The Earth says it would avail not to reply—

> "Thou art immortal, and this tongue is known
> But to the uncommunicating dead.
> Death is the veil which those who live call life:
> They sleep, and it is lifted."

Then the Earth tells them of a cave where there is a temple built by men who became mad, inhaling the madness of the Earth herself in the evil time. Now that madness is past, and a Spirit shall guide them to the cave. The Spirit appears in the likeness of a winged child, and in the fourth scene Prometheus, Asia, Panthea, Ione, and the Spirit of the Earth are in front of the cave. Panthea tells how the Spirit of the Earth, in the time before the tyranny of Jupiter, had loved Asia—

> "And with her
> It made its childish confidence, and told her
> All it had known or seen, for it saw much,
> Yet idly reasoned what it saw."

The Spirit of the Earth now joyfully returns to Asia, and tells of the wonderful change that has come over the world. Then the Spirit of the Hour enters and tells of the same change, and how thrones, altars, judgment-seats, and prisons now stand, not overthrown, but unregarded.

So the act ends. The fourth act was an afterthought. Shelley wrote it, no doubt, that he might have full scope for expressing the rapture of the delivered universe. It is like the triumphant finale of a symphony, with variety of form but none of emotion, except what comes from contrasting present good with past evil. There is a long duet between the Earth and the Moon, each echoing the delight of the other; and at the end of it Demogorgon addresses them both, and all the stars, and the happy dead, and the elemental genii—

"Who have homes
From man's high mind even to the central stone
Of sullen lead; from Heaven's star-fretted domes
To the dull weed some sea-worm battens on."

And all beasts and birds, and leaves and buds, and the lightning and wind, and last of all—

"Man who wert once a despot and a slave;
A dupe and a deceiver; a decay;
A traveller from the cradle to the grave
Through the dim night of this immortal day."

His address ends the poem with the praise of Prometheus.

This short account of "Prometheus Unbound" will show how difficult Shelley found it to adapt his subject to a dramatic form. He was often hard put to it to make anything happen at all. There is only one great event in this drama, namely, the fall of Jupiter, and that is causeless; nor are we made to understand how or why it produces the effects which come of it. Apart from this there is movement but not action. The characters drift about aimlessly in magic cars or led by Echoes and Spirits. And most of them are so abstract that we do not even know who they are or what relation they bear to each other. There is no explanation of Asia, Panthea, and Ione except that they are sister Oceanides and that Asia loves Prometheus. Even the significance of their names is obscure.

Then there are Earth and Ocean and the Spirits of the Earth and of the Moon; and, since the Earth herself is personified, it is difficult to find a distinction between her and the Spirit of the Earth. These characters are uninteresting in themselves because they tell us nothing about themselves, and because Shelley seems to know nothing about them. There are also incidents which bewilder rather than interest. Thus, in the first act Prometheus wishes to hear again the curse which he had uttered against Jupiter, because he would recall it. Nothing earthly dare repeat it to him. But the Earth tells him that there is a world underneath the grave—

> "Where do inhabit
> The shadows of all forms that think and live
> Till death unite them and they part no more."

There are the phantasms of Prometheus himself, of Demogorgon, and of Jupiter. If he will, he may summon up one of them to repeat the curse. He will not have it repeated by anything resembling himself, so he summons the phantasm of Jupiter. If this is only a device of Shelley's to have the curse repeated it is not worth the space given to it, and I can see no further significance in it. There are other episodes that seem to be mere pretexts for lyrical poetry, such as that in the first and second scenes of the second act, when Asia and Panthea are led by echoes to the cave of Demogorgon, and choruses of Spirits sing wonderful songs about their way. And when they find Demogorgon and question him about the nature of the universe, he of course can tell them no more than Shelley knows, so that very little comes of their visit. Throughout the poem there are attempts to explain things, which only leave the reader bewildered and unsatisfied, like the same attempts in "Paradise Lost." Poets, like all other writers, must fail when they try to tell us what they do not know themselves.

Shelley lacked, more than most poets, that kind of knowledge which is needed for the representation of action; and whatever action there is in "Prometheus" belongs to a state of being about which no man could know anything. We cannot therefore regard the poem as a drama; and the question arises whether it has any form at all, or whether the plot is only a pretext for a number of separate poems. Now the great value of form in a work of art is that it gives a cumulative power to all the parts and details of that work. They are not there for their own sake but in the accomplishment of a purpose outside them, and their beauties please us the more as we see them in relation to that purpose. Therefore, before we dogmatise about the lack of form in "Prometheus," we must consider whether the poem has any cumulative power; and no one, I think, can read it without seeing that it has. This cumulative power does not come from the action, but from the emotion which the characters and the plot are a mere machinery for expressing.

Shelley himself called the poem a lyrical drama, and it is, in fact, one extended and diversified lyric, uttered now by one singer, now by another, and now by choruses. And as in a lyric of ordinary length we have to assume, or to gather from slight suggestions, the cause of the emotion expressed, so in "Prometheus" we have really to assume the action and the circumstances which are pretexts for the expression of emotion.

There is always a tendency in the poetic drama to become lyrical, to concern itself more with emotional effects than with the action that causes them; and the more lyrical a drama becomes, the nearer it approaches to music, and particularly to the symphony. "Prometheus" is nearer to music than any other drama I know, and in form it is nearer to symphony than to drama. In a symphony we often hear one movement expressing trouble and desire, followed by another expressing attainment and delight, without, of course, any expression of the means by which desire is accomplished. Yet the movements are related to each other, because the same desire which is expressed in one is accomplished in the other. There is, in fact, a unity and a cumulative power of emotion; and there seems to me to be the same unity and cumulative power in "Prometheus." Being poetry and not music, it is, of course, to be judged as poetry; and, as I have tried to show, it fails to solve some of the problems peculiar to that art, or at least, to the form of that art in which it is written.

But Shelley was a great innovator in poetry. He brought it nearer to music than it had ever been brought before, nearer to a complete fusion of emotion and idea. And innovators are sure to have trouble with their machinery, especially when they are young and inexperienced. The machinery of "Prometheus" belongs to the past, and Shelley could only adapt it very imperfectly to his purpose. That purpose was to present idea and emotion all in one. He was not content with lyrical poetry of pure emotion; more than any other poet he was moved to emotion by ideas, and that is the reason why his emotions were so persistent and needed a long poem for their expression. Other poets have been moved to different emotions by particular events and experiences, and have expressed them either in short lyrics or in incidental passages of drama or narrative. Thought and experience and the spectacle of the universe all continually aroused the same emotion in Shelley, because he was always possessed by the same ideal. All emotions are caused by a comparison of the real with the ideal, and are delightful when the real seems to harmonise with the ideal, and painful when there is a discord between them. In Shelley's mind ideals were always predominant and always the same, incessantly compared with the real, and incessantly producing the same emotion through that comparison. He was like an angel strayed on to the earth, and by all experience provoked to contrast his present state with his past. He could not, like Shakespeare or Rembrandt, love things of the earth for their own sake. His ideals possessed him as some men are possessed by appetites, and they produced emotions so quickly out of experience that they often prevented him from seeing the true nature and significance of experience. But still they were real emotions, produced by his own ideals out of his own experience. He has been called a visionary, but he was not one of those visionaries who shut themselves up with their own ideal away from reality. He was always in fierce conflict with a great part of reality, and out of that conflict came the experience and emotion which he expressed in "Prometheus."

Though Shelley was not rich in experience of mankind he was rich in experience of ideas, and the more so because these immediately moved him to emotion. "Prometheus," therefore, is not empty, as it would be if it were the work of a poet who cared for nothing but emotion. It is necessary to insist upon the fact that Shelley was an intellectual poet, because, since in his finest works he expressed rather the emotions provoked by his ideas than the ideas themselves, there are many readers who do not find the ideas behind his emotions. But it is not possible for a critic to explain these ideas in prose, because, since they were emotionally conceived in Shelley's mind, they could only be expressed emotionally, that is to say, in poetry.

The central idea of "Prometheus"—that the world is sick of an organic disease, and can only be cured by a miracle—has been expressed in many religions. But the notion that this disease is the result of a celestial tyranny—and that not man alone, but everything in the universe, suffers from it—is peculiar to Shelley, and the result of his extreme idealism. He could accept nothing as it is; he could not reconcile himself to the fact that there are poisonous plants. Therefore when Jupiter falls, and the great change comes over the universe, the Spirit of the Earth tells how—

"O'er a lake
Upon a drooping bough with nightshade twined,
I saw two azure halcyons clinging downward
And thinning one bright bunch of amber berries,
With quick long beaks, and in the deep there lay
Those lovely forms imaged as in a sky."

It was not enough that there should be a sweet peal of music at midnight, and all the people should come into the streets transfigured with a new beauty; there must also be no more poison in nightshade berries, and no more tempests on the sea.

This idea has not much intellectual value, though it may have been Shelley's first advance towards realising the universal imperfection of things, and reconciling himself to that imperfection as a condition of infinite improvement. But it seems to me nearer to the truth than the idea that "only man is vile" in a perfect and beautiful universe; and it has poetic value in "Prometheus," because it was real to Shelley and begotten in him by his intense desire for perfection. Therefore he was able to express that desire through it, and often in language of extreme beauty. But his passion for perfection expressed itself also in another idea of greater intellectual value, namely, that the highest beauties and excellences of this life are prophetic of a nobler state of being. In this idea he was nearer to an understanding of the promise of universal imperfection; for it is through the universality of imperfection, and the infinite variety in the quality of all things which it implies, that we are continually led to compare the better with the worse, and to aim at the better. The finest things are, indeed, prophetic to us of what all life may some day be. Thus, when the Furies have tortured Prometheus by revealing to him how the highest hopes come to nought and good is perverted into evil, how the French Revolution became the Terror, and how men have persecuted in the name of Christ, the Earth to comfort him summons—

> "Those subtle and fair Spirits,
> Whose homes are the dim caves of human thought,
> And who inhabit, as birds wing the wind,
> Its world-surrounding ether. They behold
> Beyond that twilight realm, as in a glass,
> The future."

The first Spirit comes on a trumpet's blast, and tells of the soul of love triumphing over all the confused sounds of battle. The second comes from a shipwreck—

"On the sigh
Of one who gave an enemy
His plank, then plunged aside to die."

The third comes borne by a dream from a sage's bed. And the fourth sings, perhaps, the most beautiful song that Shelley ever made:—

"On a poet's lips I slept
Dreaming like a love-adept
In the sound his breathing kept;
Nor seeks nor finds he mortal blisses,
But feeds on the aëreal kisses
Of shapes that haunt thought's wildernesses.
He will watch from dawn to gloom
The lake-reflected sun illume
The yellow bees in the ivy bloom,
Nor heed nor see, what things they be;
But from these create he can
Forms more real than living man,
Nurslings of immortality."

Here Shelley speaks for himself and out of his own experience, showing us how beautiful things were indeed to him prophetic of a nobler life because of their beauty, and how he could transform that beauty into the music of his verse, so that nothing of what he had seen remained in it except beauty. He was interested in things, not for their own sake and character, but for their relation to his ideal; and he would heighten them to that ideal if it were possible, and reject them utterly if it were not. "Prometheus" is an attempt to treat the whole universe in this way, and consists entirely of such transformations and rejections, all made according to one persistent ideal.

Needless to say, Shelley is happier when he transforms than when he rejects. He could not make poetry out of the conflict and mixture of good and evil in our nature. Evil to him is always pure evil, and it is apt to set him screaming rather than singing. Writing to Godwin about "The Revolt of Islam," he had said, "I cannot but be conscious, in much of what I write, of an absence of that tranquillity which is the attribute and accompaniment of power." There is still that absence when he speaks of evil in "Prometheus," and also in some lyrical passages intended to express power and speed and boundless exultation. For such themes Shelley's mind was still too girlish, and his voice in his poetry seems to be girlish, too, and to be overstrained when he tries to sing loud. But he treats of pure beauty with a tranquillity new in his poetry, and not to be found in any other English poet except Milton. Here is a passage in which Ocean speaks after the fall of Jupiter has given her eternal calm:—

> "The loud deep calls me home even now to feed it
> With azure calm out of the emerald urns
> Which stand for ever full beside my throne.
> Behold the Nereids under the green sea,
> Their wavering limbs borne on the wind-like stream,
> Their white arms lifted o'er their streaming hair
> With garlands pied and starry sea-flower crowns,
> Hastening to grace their mighty sister's joy."

Macaulay said that Shelley possessed some of the highest qualities of the great ancient writers; and it is true that at his best he is rather a classical than a romantic poet, that he simplifies and concentrates like no other poet of his time, that his music is divinely clear rather than rich. In his preface to "Prometheus" he says that his imagery "will be found in many instances to have been drawn from the operations of the human mind or from those external actions by which they are expressed," and that in this he follows the example of the Greek poets. There is a fine example of this in the third scene of the second act, where he speaks of—

> "The sun-awakened avalanche, whose mass,
> Thrice sifted by the storm, had gathered there
> Flake after flake, in heaven-defying minds
> As thought by thought is piled, till some great truth
> Is loosened, and the nations echo round,
> Shaken to their roots, as do the mountains now."

But he carries the process much farther in those passages where he imparts humanity to natural forces in metaphor so instinctive that it seems to be direct statement—

"The pale stars are gone!
For the sun, their swift shepherd,
To their folds them compelling,
In the depths of the dawn,
Hastes in meteor-eclipsing array, and they flee
Beyond his blue dwelling,
As fawns flee the leopard."

This has been quoted as an instance of Shelley's myth-making power; and it was indeed natural to him to make myths, because the life of nature seemed to him as real and intense as the life of man, and he almost made friends with the sun and the stars, and the winds, and the clouds, as some men made friends with wild animals. But as he seems to impart humanity to the forces of nature, so also, at his heights of inspiration, he can write of his personifications as if they were natural things like the sun or the clouds. All the scenery described in "Prometheus" is not mere surplusage. Prometheus seems to belong to it and to have grown out of it. He complains that the rock-embosomed lawns and snow-fed streams will commune with him no longer, though he alone had checked the falsehood and force of Jupiter, who now—

"With the groans of pining slaves
Fills your dim glens and highest wildernesses."

And the Earth answers that they dare not. Often the characters of the poem seem to be fading away like mists among its forests and mountains, or to be only the voices of nature made articulate in the poet's music. And at the highest point of his inspiration, when a voice in the air sings the miraculous song "Life of Life," he imagines a being that seems to be idealised from nature almost as much as from man:—

"Child of light, thy limbs are burning
Through the vest which seems to hide them;
As the radiant lines of morning
Through the clouds ere they divide them;
And this atmosphere divinest
Shrouds thee wheresoe'er thou shinest."

This is sung when the universe is close on its regeneration, and the imagination of Shelley seems to be pained by the intensity of its effort to leap at a bound from the imperfect reality to the perfect ideal. He was always apt to empty the universe of everything except himself and the ideal; and when he had done this he was filled with the fright of loneliness, and thought of himself as drawn to the ideal like a moth to a candle out of the empty night, as one who had travelled too far and high for a man still subject to the laws of this life, and as likely to perish like the first adventurer into an unknown world:—

"Lamp of earth, where'er thou movest
Its dim shapes are clad with brightness,
And the souls of whom thou lovest
Walk upon the winds with lightness,
Till they fail, as I am failing,
Dizzy, lost, yet unbewailing."

In the last act of pure rejoicing the characters seem to be voices of nature more than ever before. Shelley has very little notion what mankind will do in their millennium. He had not, like William Morris, imagined a Utopia in which men should enjoy their daily work, freed from all the ignominies of the present struggle for life, and should make the world beautiful with their delight in it. Prometheus, as soon as he is released, describes a cave—

"All overgrown with trailing odorous plants,
Which curtain out the day with leaves and flowers,
And paved with veined emerald, and a fountain
Leaps in the midst with an awakening sound."

Here he will retire with the Oceanides, and here, he says, like Lear with Cordelia—

> "We will sit and talk of time and change,
> As the world ebbs and flows, ourselves unchanged.
> What can hide man from mutability?
> And if ye sigh, then I will smile; and thou,
> Ione, shalt chant fragments of sea-music,
> Until I weep, when ye shall smile away
> The tears she brought, which yet were sweet to shed.
> We will entangle buds and flowers and beams
> Which twinkle on the fountain's brim, and make
> Strange combinations out of common things,
> Like human babes in their brief innocence."

It is beautiful; but we must assume that ennui had accompanied Jupiter down to the abyss.

It is a significant fact that the poorest part of the last act is the chorus of Spirits "from the mind of human kind." Their rejoicing seems to be forced, and their music is sometimes mechanical. Even the long duet between the Earth and the Moon grows most beautiful when the Earth forgets all about her human inhabitants, and when the Moon makes a wonderful myth about herself. She feels life coming back to her, and describes it so that her very atmosphere seems to quicken:—

> "Green stalks burst forth, and bright flowers grow,
> And living shapes upon my bosom move:
> Music is in the sea and air,
> Winged clouds soar here and there,
> Dark with the rain new buds are dreaming of."

After her last wild outburst of song the Earth answers—

> "Oh, gentle Moon, the voice of thy delight
> Falls on me like thy clear and tender light
> Soothing the seaman, borne the summer night,
> Through isles for ever calm."

This is like the music of Mozart, in which the divine beauty of delight is enhanced by remembrance of pain; and no poet or musician—not even Shelley, or Mozart himself—can come nearer to Heaven than this, or give us light without the foil of darkness, or joy without the memory of sorrow. But the rapture of Shelley does not move us to tears, like the rapture of Mozart, because there seems to be less of human experience in it. There is no masterpiece in another art which reminds one so much of the last act of "Prometheus Unbound" as the two great frescoes of Correggio. His rejoicing angels seem to be as much untouched by human experience as Shelley's rejoicing voices, and his "Young Apostle" might be Shelley's triumphant "Prometheus." Both Correggio and Shelley in their raptures escaped from reality; and we may put them below the greatest masters who attempt to show us, not perfection itself, but the conflict and labour of life towards a perfection which, they know, no man can even conceive. But it is right that youthful genius should attempt this impossibility; for it is a part of the necessary imperfection of youth that it should be thus impatient of imperfection, and should strain after these escapes from reality. Shelley tried to compose a drama with neither death nor marriage for its end, nor any solution short of universal felicity; and of course he failed. For drama proceeds by action, and he could conceive of no action that would produce universal felicity. All forms of art belong to reality, and are themselves confessions of the imperfection of art; therefore Shelley could find no form of art suited to his attempt to represent perfection. But, by the intensity of his effort to represent it, he produced beauties beyond the reach of artists who attempt the possible. Success would have meant a work emptied of all reality, a mere abstraction, like a perfect circle. In his failure he expressed that very conflict which he tried to transcend; and it is curious that in the last stanzas of the poem he seems to recognise this, and to make an exultant submission to the laws of reality:—

"To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory."

Wonder has been expressed that Shelley should in the same year have produced two works so unlike each other as "Prometheus Unbound" and "The Cenci." It was certainly a great feat, but rather of energy than of versatility; for they are more alike than one might suppose. True, the subject of "Prometheus" is a myth invented by the poet, and the subject of "The Cenci" is a story of real life. But in each a fearful wrong is inflicted upon a virtuous being by a tyrant of inexplicable wickedness. Count Cenci is only Jupiter in another set of circumstances, and Beatrice only Prometheus. The end is different, like the circumstances; but there is the same conception of evil, and the same blind revolt against it. In "The Cenci" Shelley does not try to escape from reality; but he represents it, as in the first part of "Prometheus," as suffering from an organic disease which could only be cured by a miracle. The difference is that in "The Cenci" the miracle does not happen.

The preface to "The Cenci" is one of the best pieces of prose that Shelley ever wrote. In it he explains that his purpose is tragic, and contends that his subject is one fitted for tragedy. Beatrice, he says, is a tragic character, because she took revenge for her wrongs. "It is in the restless and anatomising casuistry with which men seek the justification of Beatrice, yet feel that she has done what needs justification; it is in the superstitious horror with which they contemplate alike her wrongs and their revenge, that the dramatic character of what she did and suffered consists."

The story of the play is very simple. Count Cenci, a monster of wickedness, hates all his children. He exults in the death of two of his sons and violates his daughter, rather because he wishes to do her an intolerable wrong than from incestuous desire. She resolves to have him murdered, and hires two bravoes to murder him. The papal legate arrives, just after the Count's death, and the bravoes are discovered. One of them dies fighting; the other is captured, and, under torture, confesses that the murder had been commissioned by Beatrice. The Pope will not pardon her, in spite of her wrongs, because, being an old man, he has a peculiar fear of parricide, and because Count Cenci had been in the habit of paying vast sums for the pardon of his misdeeds. The play ends just before the execution of Beatrice.

Shelley himself says that the story of "The Cenci" is eminently fearful and monstrous, and that anything like a dry exhibition of it on the stage would be insupportable. In a letter to Peacock he compares it with the story of "Œdipus." But there is this difference between the two, that the incest of "Œdipus" is an event that happened before the "Œdipus Tyrannus" begins. The incest of Count Cenci is the central event of the play. The incest of Œdipus was committed in ignorance. It has, therefore, nothing to do with his character; and we are not expected to take any interest in it, but only in the results of its discovery. Thus the same objection does not apply to it as to the incest of Count Cenci, namely, that it is an action which cannot be dramatically treated. There is no attempt to treat it dramatically in the "Œdipus Tyrannus," because it belongs to the past. But in "The Cenci" it belongs to the present, and is the chief act of the villain, the act upon which the whole play turns. Shelley says in his preface that "Such a story, if told so as to present to the reader all the feelings of those who once acted it, their hopes and fears, their confidences and misgivings, their various interests, passions, and opinions, acting upon, and with each other, yet all conspiring to one tremendous end, would be as a light to make apparent some of the most dark and secret caverns of the human heart." Yet he has chosen a story which he cannot tell in such a way. He must and does leave all the motives of Count Cenci obscure, and also most of the effects of his crime upon Beatrice. He can, indeed, only hint darkly at the nature of that crime. In fact, the central event of the play is disguised in eloquent verse, just like the central event of "Prometheus"; and for the same reason, namely, that the poet knows nothing about it.

Shelley, as I have said, did not understand wickedness at all. Therefore he was not fit to write a play about it. He chose a piece of inexplicable wickedness for his subject just because of this lack of understanding. What interested him was not the nature and causes of that wickedness, but merely its enormity; for that enormity seemed to him typical of the present condition of the universe. His Count Cenci has no feeling that he is out of harmony with God. Indeed he speaks of God as if he were the Jupiter of "Prometheus Unbound":—

> "My soul, which is a scourge, will I resign
> Into the hands of Him who wielded it;
> Be it for its own punishment or theirs,
> He will not ask it of me till the lash
> Be broken in its last and deepest wound;
> Until its hate be all inflicted."

And again—

> "I do not feel as if I were a man,
> But like a fiend appointed to chastise
> The offences of some unremembered world."

In fact he expresses, not the real workings of a wicked mind, but Shelley's view of wickedness—as something imposed upon the world by a supernatural tyranny. He is the willing servant of the tyrant, while the good are all rebels against him. He delights in crime for its own sake, as if it were the satisfaction of desire, and, when about to commit crime, speaks like Troilus just before he is admitted to Cressida:—

"My blood is running up and down my veins;
A fearful pleasure makes it prick and tingle.
I feel a giddy sickness of strange awe;
My heart is beating with an expectation
Of horrid joy."

When a poet writes of what he hates, but does not understand, he falls naturally into rhetoric. "The Cenci," therefore, consists mainly of rhetoric. It has been called the finest English tragedy of modern times; and it certainly is the finest Elizabethan tragedy of modern times. For Elizabethan tragedy, except at its highest moments, was rhetorical, and Shelley reproduced Elizabethan rhetoric with extraordinary ease and skill. But Elizabethan tragedy had been dead for nearly two hundred years when he tried to write it, and he could not bring it to life again. The Elizabethan rhetoric was often an ornate and elaborate expression of what real men and women would say or think in the circumstances contrived by the dramatist. But Shelley's rhetoric, though more beautiful perhaps than any except Shakespeare's, has usually no relation to reality. "The Cenci" is a wonderful *tour de force,* but we cannot believe in anything that happens in it. Indeed, it is far more unreal than "Prometheus"; for in "Prometheus" Shelley was frequently expressing his own emotion and experience, but in "The Cenci" seldom. He said that he had "avoided with great care, in writing this play, the introduction of what is commonly called mere poetry"; and it is true that he attends to business throughout. But it is a business he does not understand; and his characters talk about that business as if they were observing it like eloquent but inexperienced poets, not as if they were actors in it. In the trial scene Beatrice reminds us of Vittoria Corombona in the trial scene of Webster's "White Devil," and very likely Shelley also remembered Webster when he wrote it. Webster is very rhetorical; but his Vittoria is a real woman, and speaks like one through all disguises of rhetoric:—

"Turn up my faults, I pray, and you shall find
That beauty, and gay clothes, a merry heart,
And a good stomach to a feast are all,
All the poor crimes that you can charge me with.
In faith, my lord, you might go pistol flies;
The sport would be more noble."

Beatrice talks finer poetry, and argues with great skill and spirit, but she might be an eloquent advocate in another's cause. There is no character in what she says, and, therefore, it is not interesting because she says it. Her speech about death is almost as beautiful as the famous speech of Claudio in "Measure for Measure." But the first part of it might be made by any one who was young and about to die; and the second part, when she fears lest she shall meet her father's spirit beyond the grave, is a mere expression of Shelley's sense of the omnipotence of evil:—

"For was he not alone omnipotent
On earth and ever present? Even though dead,
Does not his spirit live in all that breathe,
And work for me and mine still the same ruin,
Scorn, pain, despair?"

In fact "The Cenci" seems to me to prove rather Shelley's power of writing brilliantly on any subject than his dramatic capacity. He had said to Peacock a year before, when proposing to write a play upon Tasso, "I have taken the resolution to see what kind of a tragedy a person without dramatic talent could write." "The Cenci" is the finest possible tragedy that such a person could produce. Shelley himself thought little of it compared with "Prometheus"; but believed that it was fitted for the stage, and tried to get it acted. It has been acted in modern times. Accounts differ as to the effect which it produced. I think it must have been tedious rather than repulsive. Shelley treated his subject with perfect delicacy. But the main event of a play should not be one that needs such treatment.

CHAPTER XI

"THE WITCH OF ATLAS" AND "EPIPSYCHIDION"

SHELLEY found that the climate of Florence did not suit his health. Therefore he went with Mary and Claire to Pisa at the ends of January 1820, travelling by boat up the Arno as far as Empoli. They lived quietly at Pisa; the place suited Shelley better than Florence, and he got some benefit from the skill of an eminent doctor, by name Vacca. In March Shelley wrote the "Sensitive Plant," a poem of pure fancy and description, full of beautiful verses but with a theme too slight for its length. It is written in anapæsts (or triple time), and Shelley's mastery of the metre is uncertain. Indeed no English poet has managed triple time perfectly, at least in serious verse, before William Morris and Swinburne. Shelley often falls into the mechanical see-saw of the eighteenth century, as in the opening lines:—

"A sensitive plant in a garden grew,
And the light winds fed it with silver dew."

This versification is most beautiful when the metre comes nearest to being iambic:—

"Broad water-lilies lay tremulously,
And starry river-buds glimmered by."

These two lines might be followed by pure iambics without incongruity. Many of the most anapæstic verses cannot be read without gabbling, and, in the conclusion, Shelley seems to subside into iambics with relief.[1]

At this time he was more than ever harassed by the importunities of Godwin, who was utterly demoralised by incessant want of money, and who considered that Shelley, having run away with his daughter, must be for ever in his debt. Shelley spoke in a letter of Godwin's implacable exactions, and boundless and plausible sophistry. "I have given you," he said to Godwin, "the amount of a considerable fortune, and have destituted myself, for the purpose of realising it, of nearly four times the amount." He was most angry with Godwin because of the letters which he wrote to Mary. "Mary," he said, "is now giving suck to her infant, in whose life, after the frightful events of the last two years, her own seems wholly to be bound up. Your letters, from their style and spirit (such is your erroneous notion of taste), never fail to produce an appalling effect on her frame. On one occasion agitation of mind produced through her a disorder in the child similar to that which destroyed our little girl two years ago." Therefore Mary had authorised him to intercept all letters from Godwin to her which were likely to disturb her mind. He had so intercepted the letter to which he was now replying. "Mary," he said, "has not, nor ought she to have, the disposal of money; if she had, poor thing, she would give it all to you. Such a father (I mean a man of such high genius) can be at no loss to find subjects on which to address such a daughter." Godwin thought this letter scurrilous, but continued his importunities.

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[1] I use the terms iambic and anapæstic without intending to commit myself to any theory of English metre, and only because they are the best I can find for my purpose.

It is the plain duty of every man, in this life and in our society, to get enough money to support himself and his family. No one can absolve himself of this duty on the plea that he is doing vast though unpaid services to mankind. That, no doubt, was Godwin's plea; but it is proved unsound by the effect which it had on his character. He became a beggar, with all the vices of a beggar and all the arrogance of a pretender to genius.

Medwin has a story that, while at Pisa, Shelley went one day to ask for letters at the post-office, when an Englishman, hearing his name, turned on him, and saying, "What, are you that damned atheist Shelley?" knocked him down. The man went away to Genoa, whither Shelley followed him, according to Medwin, but could hear no more of him.

Peacock thinks the whole affair was one of Shelley's delusions. Medwin says that the Englishman's rage was produced by the abuse of "The Revolt of Islam" in the *Quarterly Review.* In June 1820 the Shelleys and Claire went to Leghorn, where the Gisbornes lent them their house, Casa Ricci. Claire was in great anxiety about her child, as Byron was living with the Countess Guiccioli. She entreated Byron to allow the child to visit her, but he would not. Shelley also wrote to Byron, pleading for Claire. "Poor thing," he said, "she is very unhappy and in bad health, and she ought to be treated with as much indulgence as possible. The weak and the foolish are in this respect like kings—they can do no wrong." This last sentence might be quoted to show that in Shelley there was indeed an *anima naturaliter Christiana.* Her anxiety made Claire more difficult than usual, and she was constantly quarrelling with Mary.

> "Heigh-ho! the Claire and the Ma
> Find something to fight about every day,"

she wrote in her journal. She, like Godwin, though for other reasons, was permanently in a false position, and suffered for it and made others suffer all her life. When Mary at the end of her life had attained to peace and prosperity, Claire was coming to stay with her at Field Place. Lady Shelley, Mary's daughter-in-law, wished to be away during her visit, but Mary cried, "Don't go, dear! don't leave me alone with her! She has been the bane of my life ever since she was three years old." At Leghorn Shelley wrote his "Letter to Maria Gisborne," his best piece of familiar verse. Mrs. Gisborne was in London, and Shelley described to her the famous men she was to see. He still has a few admiring generalities for Godwin—or at least for his past.

> "You will see
> That which was Godwin, greater none than he
> Though fallen—and fallen on evil times—to stand
> Among the spirits of our age and land,
> Before the dread tribunal of *to come*,
> The foremost, while Rebuke cowers pale and dumb."

But the best description is of Coleridge, whom Shelley did not know :—

> "You will see Coleridge ; he who sits obscure
> In the exceeding lustre and the pure
> Intense irradiation of a mind,
> Which, with its own internal lightning blind,
> Flags wearily through darkness and despair—
> A cloud-encircled meteor of the air,
> A hooded eagle among blinking owls."

In this poem Shelley competes with the poets of the eighteenth century on their own ground and in their own metre. In some things he surpasses and in others falls short of them. Since he does not confine the sense within the limits of the couplet, his verse runs more freely and naturally than theirs. He seems to be writing a real letter, and not a mere pretext for verse-making. He has none of the mechanical antitheses which the strict heroic couplet encouraged even in its greatest master, Pope. And at the same time he can rise into pure poetry without effort or incongruity, because he puts on no airs of worldly wisdom, and because his verse is flexible enough for all purposes.

But the flexibility of his verse has its drawbacks. It encourages his fancy to ramble, and discourages the concentration and terseness which give to familiar verse its chief advantage over prose. We do not remember the "Letter to Maria Gisborne" so well as the "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," although there is more subtle truth in the description of Coleridge than in the description of Addison. Pope used all his art to catch the ear of men ; Shelley did not, and has only compelled an audience for his greatest works by the sheer force of his genius.

Shelley had heard that Southey was the author of the virulent article upon "The Revolt of Islam" in the *Quarterly Review*. It was really by John Taylor Coleridge. He had treated the article with the contempt which it deserved, making childish and elaborate fun of it in a letter to Ollier. "There is one very droll thing in the *Quarterly*," he wrote. "They say that 'my chariot wheels are broken.' Heaven forbid! My chariot, you may tell them, was built by one of the best makers in Bond Street, and it has gone several thousand miles in perfect security. What a comical thing it would be to make the following advertisement: 'A report having prevailed, in consequence of some insinuations in the *Quarterly Review*, that Mr. Shelley's chariot-wheels are broken, Mr. Charteris, of Bond Street, begs to assure the public that they, having carried him through Italy, France, and Switzerland, still continue in excellent repair.'" But he was angry with Southey, and wished to have it out with him. Therefore he wrote, in June, asking Southey to assure him that he had not written the article. This Southey, no doubt to Shelley's surprise, was able to do. He had never, he said, mentioned Shelley's name in any of his writings, and had read nothing of Shelley's since "Alastor." But he was determined to improve the occasion. "The specimens," he wrote, "which I happen to have seen in reviews and newspapers have confirmed my opinion that your powers for poetry are of a high order; but the manner in which those powers have been employed is such as to prevent me from feeling any desire to see more of productions so monstrous in their kind and pernicious in their tendency." With conscious rectitude he exclaimed that he could not think of Shelley without the deepest compassion. He had said once that the great difference between them was that Shelley was nineteen and he himself eight-and-thirty. "Would that the difference were no greater now." In fact he wrote as if he were a British matron addressing a girl who had lost her virtue. "Opinions are to be judged by their effects, and what has been the fruit of yours? Do they enable you to look backward with complacency or forward with hope? . . . Have they not brought immediate misery upon others, and guilt, which is all but irremediable, on yourself?" Southey was a good man, but too much aware of his own virtue; and the natural pleasure which he took in saying nasty things was heightened by his belief that he said them for Shelley's good. Shelley's reply ought to have lessened his pleasure. "Even when recommending

Christianity," he wrote, "you cannot forbear breathing out defiance against the express words of Christ." "You ar such a pure one as Jesus Christ found not in all Judæa to throw the first stone."

Then follows a passage in which Shelley seems to imply that he could have got a divorce from Harriet if he had chosen.[1] If that was what he meant, he must have been still firmly persuaded of Harriet's unfaithfulness.

"You say," he continues, "that you judge of opinions by their fruits; so do I, but by their remote and permanent fruits—such fruits of rash judgment as Christianity seems to have produced in you. The immediate fruits of all new opinions are indeed calamity to their promulgators and professors; but we see the end of nothing; and it is in acting well, in contempt of present advantage, that virtue consists." Southey had hoped that Shelley might be brought to a better mind by his wretched state of health, which he had mentioned in his first letter, and Shelley therefore ended with this P.S.: "I ought not to omit that I have had sickness enough, and that at this moment I have so severe a pain in my side that I can hardly write. All this is of no account in favour of what you or any one else calls Christianity; surely it would be better to wish me health and healthful sensations. *I* hope the chickens will not come home to roost." This last remark, Professor Dowden points out, is an allusion to the motto of "The Curse of Kehama." "Curses are like young chickens, they always come home to roost." Southey wrote another letter in the same strain as his first, and so the correspondence ended. It is a pity that a worthy and industrious man like Southey thought fit to write so much of matters which he did not understand. He was born to make books like the "Life of Nelson." He knew nothing of life or politics, and, when he attacked men like Byron and Shelley in defence of what he took to be orthodoxy, he did neither himself nor his cause justice. Half-conscious, perhaps, of his own incompetence, he assumed a ferocity that was not natural to him, and appeared as ridiculous as a sheep in wolf's clothing. His letters can only have confirmed Shelley in his opinion that the orthodox had nothing to say for themselves; and it is difficult to believe that when he wrote them he had any sincere purpose of bringing Shelley to a better mind.

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[1] Professor Dowden suggests that this is the meaning of an obscure sentence, and it seems to me that it can have no other.

At the beginning of August Shelley and his family left Leghorn because of the heat, and went to a village, San Giuliano di Pisa, about four miles from Pisa and at the foot of the mountains. Climbing alone to the top of Monte san Pellegrino Shelley conceived the idea of the "Witch of Atlas," and wrote the poem, 670 lines, in three days. Mary wished that he would increase his popularity by adopting subjects that would more suit the popular taste than a poem conceived in the abstract and dreamy spirit of the "Witch of Atlas." She believed that "he would obtain a greater mastery over his own powers, and greater happiness in his mind, if public applause crowned his endeavours." Shelley wrote an introduction, addressed to her, "on her objecting" to the following poem upon the score of its containing no human interest:—

"How, my dear Mary, are you critic-bitten
  (For vipers kill, though dead) by some review,
That you condemn these verses I have written,
  Because they tell no story, false or true?
What, though no mice are caught by a young kitten,
  May it not leap and play as grown cats do,
Till its claws come? Prithee, for this one time,
Content thee with a visionary rhyme."

There can be no doubt, I think, that Mary gave good advice; and that Shelley, when he wrote poems like the "Witch of Atlas," was rather spending his powers than training them, like a young painter of great facility who makes pictures out of his own head instead of studying nature. It is full of beautiful verses that would seem twice as beautiful if they were related to any main theme; but the Witch herself is a faint abstraction, and does nothing except spin mist and store magic treasures in her cave—

visions and odours and liquors that would give glorious dreams, and scrolls that would teach men to live "harmonious as the sacred stars above." The nymphs and oreads and naiads wish to live for ever in the light of her presence; but she will not have this, for she is immortal and they are mortal:—

"Oh, ask not me
To love you till your little race is run;
I cannot die as ye must—over me
Your leaves shall glance—the streams in which ye dwell
Shall be my paths henceforth, and so, farewell!"

She had, of course, a boat, which Vulcan had made to be a chariot for the star of Venus:—

"But it was found too feeble to be fraught
With all the ardours in that sphere which are,
And so she sold it, and Apollo bought
And gave it to this daughter: from a car
Changed to the fairest and the lightest boat
Which ever upon mortal stream did float."

She kneaded fire and snow together into a living image, winged and sexless, and put it at the prow of the boat; and taking the rudder herself, set off on a voyage, like Alastor, down the mountain streams:—

"And ever as she went, the image lay
With folded wings and unawakened eyes."

But, when she wished to go up stream she called "Hermaphroditus," and it would awake and use its ethereal vans for oars. A great part of the poem is taken up with a description of her wanderings on the water and among the clouds, how—

"She would often climb
The steepest ladder of the crudded rack
Up to some beaked cape of cloud sublime,
And like Arion on the dolphin's back
Ride singing through the shoreless air."

But her choicest sport was to visit Egypt in the night, gliding down the Nile, and to look at mortals asleep:—

"To those she saw most beautiful, she gave
  Strange panacea in a crystal bowl.
They drank in their deep sleep of that sweet wave,
  And lived thenceforward as if some control
Mightier than life, were in them; and the grave
  Of such, when death oppressed the weary soul,
Was as a green and overarching bower
Lit by the gems of many a starry flower."

The poem becomes faintly satirical towards the end, telling how the Witch

"Would write strange dreams upon the brain
  Of those who were less beautiful, and make
All harsh and crooked purposes more vain
  Than in the desert is the serpent's wake
Which the sand covers."

Then—

"The priests would write an explanation full,
  Translating hieroglyphics into Greek,
How the god Apis really was a bull
  And nothing more; and bid the herald stick
The same against the temple doors, and pull
  The old cant down."

And the king would set an ape on his throne, and the soldiers dream they were blacksmiths and beat their swords into ploughshares. The Witch also furthered what is commonly known as "free love."

"And timid lovers who had been so coy,
  They hardly knew whether they loved or not,
Would rise out of their rest and take sweet joy,
  To the fulfilment of their inmost thought;
And when next day the maiden and the boy
  Met one another, both, like sinners caught,
Blushed at the thing which each believed was done
  Only in fancy—till the tenth moon shone."

But no harm came of it all, for the Witch

> "Would let them take no ill:
> Of many thousand schemes which lovers find,
> The Witch found one, and so they took their fill
> Of happiness in marriage warm and kind."

The poem is indeed an escape from reality. Here Shelley writes as Correggio painted Io and Antiope and Danae; and indeed many great artists have delighted to represent youthful passion freed by different devices from all the restraints of circumstance. There is the device of the love potion in the story of Tristram and Iseult, and the device of a secret marriage, which is mere machinery, in "Romeo and Juliet"; and all the devices of Greek mythology. Puritans hate these devices; but so long as they are used for purposes of beauty they do no harm, for the beauty of art casts out nastiness from the minds of all except those who find nastiness everywhere. Some critics have found deep meanings in the "Witch of Atlas." It seems to me one of those poems in which Shelley wrote about all the things that pleased him most, and of which the subject was a mere pretext for doing so. No doubt he enjoyed himself while writing it, and in certain moods it can be read with enjoyment. But he was too apt to take the line of least resistance in his art at a time of life when he ought to have laboured more against the grain. Mrs. Shelley says that he suffered from the lack of readers: "He was thrown on his own resources, and on the inspiration of his own soul; and wrote because his mind overflowed, without the hope of being appreciated." It is thus, we are often told nowadays, that every poet ought to write and every artist ought to work. But the great ages of art prove that every artist is the better for a public to which he can address himself without loss of dignity. Shelley had no such public, and felt the want of it himself. He wrote to Peacock in November of this year: "I am, speaking literally, infirm of purpose. I have great designs, and feeble hopes of ever accomplishing them. I read books, and, though I am ignorant enough, they seem to teach me nothing. To be sure, the reception the public have given me might go far enough to damp any man's enthusiasm. They teach you, it may be said, only what is true. Very true, I doubt not, and the more true the less agreeable. I can compare my experience in this respect to nothing but a series of wet blankets."

The wet blankets made him write only for himself; they did not stop him from writing. To this year belong the two long odes to "Liberty" and to "Naples"; the first written in the spring, when he heard of the Spanish Rebellion, the second in August, when a Constitution was granted to Naples. The "Ode to Liberty" is in nineteen regular stanzas of fifteen lines each, and describes the evil state of the world before the birth of liberty; and how liberty was born in Athens, and lived a while in Rome but deserted it, and was unknown for a thousand years until the time of Alfred and the rising of the cities in sacred Italy. The rest of the ode is for the most part mere rhetoric, until the last scene, in which Shelley describes the sudden end of his inspiration:—

"The solemn harmony

Paused, and the spirit of that mighty singing
To its abyss was suddenly withdrawn;
Then, as a wild swan, when sublimely winging
Its path across the thunder-smoke of dawn,
Sinks headlong through the aëreal golden light
On the heavy sounding plain,
When the bolt has pierced its brain;
As summer clouds dissolve unburthened of their rain;
As a far taper fades with fading night,
As a brief insect dies with dying day,
My song, its pinions disarrayed of might,
Drooped; o'er it closed the echoes far away
Of the great voice which did its flight sustain,
As waves which lately paved his watery way
Hiss round a drowner's head in their tempestuous play."

Shelley often describes himself as sinking thus suddenly from a heaven of song, as if he felt that all his attempts to escape from the reality that he hated must be as vain as rebellion against the attraction of gravity. The passage I have quoted shows the mastery with which he handled his elaborate stanza. In this poem Shelley revived and developed a kind of poetry which Crashaw had first made, and which we may call orchestral rather than lyrical. It has been still further developed by Swinburne in many odes. It is a magnificent means of expression, but it still waits for an English Pindar to manage it perfectly. Even the finest examples of it, of which Shelley's "Ode to Liberty" is certainly one, remind one of those modern symphonic poems in which the orchestration is apt to overpower the subject matter. There is too much imagery in the "Ode to Liberty," and versification too swift and rich, not only for the thought but for the emotion. The poem is prolonged by device after device without development of the theme. There is much more variety and continuity of music than in Gray's odes, but the same eloquent irrelevancies which seem to be a chronic vice in this kind of poetry. Thus Shelley, having told how liberty fled from Rome, proceeds to ask—

"From what Hyrcanian glen or frozen hill,
Or piny promontory of the Arctic main,
Or utmost islet inaccessible,
Didst thou lament the ruin of thy reign,
Teaching the woods and waves and desert rocks,
And every Naiad's ice-cold urn,
To talk in echoes sad and stern,
Of that sublimest love which man had dared unlearn?"

This question bears no relation to reality. Because the poet has personified Liberty, he thinks it necessary to conjecture where she was when men had lost all knowledge of her. The conjecture that she taught the woods and waves to talk of her loss is as meaningless as any frigid fancy of the eighteenth century.

The "Ode to Naples" is made up of answering epodes, strophes, and antistrophes. It matters little that they are not arranged on any classical plan. The poem has the same beauties and defects as the "Ode to Liberty." The first two epodes are taken up with a brilliant but irrelevant description of Pompeii, influenced no doubt by the same kind of descriptions in "Childe Harold," but far sweeter in music though less rhetorically effective. Then follows an address to Naples:—

> "Naples, thou Heart of men which ever pantest
> Naked, beneath the lidless eye of Heaven!
> Elysian city, which to calm enchantest
> The mutinous air and sea."

And then some vague and splendid rhetoric, in the course of which the chief cities of Italy are enumerated. The first epode returns with a glorious opening:—

> "Hear ye the march as of the Earth-born Forms
> Arrayed against the ever-living Gods?
> The crash and darkness of a thousand storms
> Bursting their inaccessible abodes
> Of crags and thunder-clouds?"

But the poem does not become more definite after these splendid generalities, as the reader naturally expects it to do. We hear of the Anarchs of the North and their legions, but soon their misdeeds are lost in imagery and the poem ends in vague good wishes.

It is when we compare these longer poems with the best of Shelley's shorter lyrics that we are least satisfied with them. In the year 1820 he wrote "The Cloud," "The Skylark," "Arethusa," the "Song of Proserpine," the "Hymn of Apollo" and the "Hymn of Pan," "The Question" and the "Two Spirits." Indeed it was his chief year for lyrics, and some of them are events in the history of the human mind. That personification which in the "Ode to Liberty" is a rhetorical device seems in "The Cloud" to be a simple telling of the truth. For the cloud was a living creature to Shelley, one of those Spirits with whose music he filled "Prometheus Unbound," and he makes it live for us through all its phases and travels. We know nothing of his Witch of Atlas, but we are familiar with clouds and can be interested in their history when it is told so as to make a new romance of the sky and one that gives a new significance to all its changes. "The Cloud" is not mere phantasy, but transfigured fact; fact emotionally apprehended by the poet, and so rendered into music:—

"I am the daughter of Earth and Water,
And the nursling of the Sky;
I pass through the pores of the ocean and shores;
I change, but I cannot die.
For after the rain when with never a stain,
The pavilion of Heaven is bare,
And the winds and sunbeams with their convex gleams,
Build up the blue dome of air,
I silently laugh at my own cenotaph,
And out of the caverns of rain,
Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb,
I arise and unbuild it again."

Here Shelley is making a new kind of myth, one that expresses exact knowledge and not primitive fancy. It is a myth in which the world seems to be emptied of human beings, or in which they are too small to be visible. But, for compensation, the life of the forces of nature becomes more intense and beautiful, and it is free from all our hatreds and griefs. There are some to whom even "The Cloud" will seem a mere exercise of fancy; but others are persuaded, by the beauty of its music, to feel that it is prophetic of a finer state of being, in which we shall all understand and delight in the processes of nature as Shelley delighted in them.

In the "Hymn of Pan" Shelley made an old myth his own. It is nearer to pure music than any of his lyrics, and yet full of sense. No English poet has ever filled verse with changes so delicate and expressive. The poem sounds as airy as a song from "The Tempest," yet it is as lucid and complete as any poem in the Greek anthology.

In August Shelley wrote "Swellfoot the Tyrant," a dull dramatic satire on the English enthusiasm for Queen Caroline, who seemed to him a poor kind of heroine. It was published, but immediately suppressed under threat of a prosecution.

In October 1820 the Shelleys were rid for a time of poor Claire. She got a situation as governess in Florence. Shelley took her there and afterwards wrote her letters which, Professor Dowden says, "contain utterances which, if we did not know how ardently Shelley gave himself away in friendship, might be regarded as the speech of a lover." As a matter of fact he was apt to be innocently in love with any woman who took his fancy, and no doubt Claire took his fancy most when he was away from her. But there is no reason to believe that he meant more in his letters to her than he had meant in his letters to Miss Hitchener. In October, too, he quarrelled with the Gisbornes, who had returned to Italy. For a little while nothing was too bad for them. Mr. Gisborne was trying to defraud him, and the whole family had treated him vilely. But a month later he was on good terms with them again and writing to Mr. Gisborne about Homer. In the autumn of 1820 Thomas Medwin, Shelley's cousin and biographer, came to Pisa at Shelley's invitation. He was soon found to be a bore, but Shelley kept some affection for him. He tells us that Shelley's hair, still curly and profuse, was now turning grey, but he had a look of youth; and a freshness and purity in his complexion, which he never lost. At the end of October the Shelleys' house was flooded by a canal. They escaped in a boat from the upper windows, and took lodgings in the Lung' Arno at Pisa, whither Claire returned to them in November as she did not like her situation.

In the diary of Claire there is an entry dated November 29, 1820, recording a visit to the Convent of St. Anna and the beautiful Teresa Viviani. This is the first we hear of a curious episode in Shelley's life. At Pisa the Shelleys made the acquaintance of Francesco Pacchiani, a professor of physics at Pisa University, an able and witty man with little reputation for morals or honesty. The Shelleys were amused by him; but he disgusted Shelley by telling a dirty story, and "would make one believe," Mary says, "that he attracts the great as a milk-pail does flies on a summer morning." Shelley compared his eloquence to that of Coleridge. Pacchiani, who was in some kind of orders, was confessor to the Vivianis, a noble family of Pisa, and had been tutor to Count Viviani's two daughters. The count had married a second wife much younger than himself. She contrived, fearing that the daughters might be her rivals with her lover, that they should be placed in separate convents. The elder of them, Teresa Emilia, had been for two years in the Convent of St. Anna. Her father wanted to marry her, if possible, to some one who would not exact a dowry. Pacchiani gave the Shelleys an eloquent account of her beauty, said that she pined like a bird in a cage, for the convent was a miserable place; and that she was made for love. Shelley took fire at the thought of a beautiful and oppressed maiden. After the first visit paid to her in her convent by Mary and Claire, the Shelleys saw her often. The convent discipline cannot have been very strict. Medwin tells us that her profuse black hair was tied in a knot after the manner of a Greek muse in the Florence Gallery, that her brow was as fair as the marble, and her height about the same as that of the antique. Her features, too, possessed almost a Grecian contour, the nose and forehead making a straight line. Her cheek was pale as marble owing to her confinement, or perhaps to thought; but her eyes had a sleepy voluptuousness. Mrs. Shelley also thought her beautiful, but found her most agreeable when silent. This was not the case with Shelley, who admired her mind as much as her body. Her parents had told her that she was to marry a man she had never seen, a younger son who would live with his mother. But she had already known love, and more than once; for she always prayed to a saint of the same name as her lover, and, when she changed her lover, changed her saint. Soon she was writing letters to Mary and to Shelley. On December 10 she already calls Shelley her dear brother, and Claire is teaching her English. Shelley is to call her sister, and she embraces her very dear and beautiful sister Mary. She implores her *sensibile* Percy to take every care of his health. Soon Shelley became an *angelica creatura*, and even, it is said, an *adorato sposo*. It appears from a letter of hers, dated December 12, that Shelley is engaging himself to effect her liberation. "I leave the *how* to you who have that wisdom and experience in which I am wanting." She asks God to pardon her mother, but loves her still and wishes her every good. Shelley had said that her liberation might perhaps divide them; but she will seek him everywhere, even to the uttermost boundaries of the world. She can never love anything or person so much as his family; for in it are included all that can exist of beautiful, virtuous, amiable, *sensibile,* and learned in the world. Writing to Mary, she complains that Mary seems a little cold sometimes; but Shelley has told her that this apparent coldness is only the ash that covers an affectionate heart. In another letter she exclaims, "You have much talent, my Mary, which, together with your virtue and your excellent heart, makes you one of the loveliest of God's or nature's creatures." Claire had told her part of Shelley's history. "His many misfortunes, his unjust persecutions, and his firm and innate virtue in the midst of these terrible and unmerited sorrows, filled my heart with admiration and affection, and made me think, and perhaps not untruly, that he is not a human creature; he has only a human exterior, but the interior is all divine. The Being of all beings has doubtless sent him to earth to accredit virtue, and to give an exact image of Himself." She could hardly have gone further in the way of praise than this; and one may wonder whether she had any notion that Shelley was really a divine poet, and capable of handing her name down to posterity, or whether she was merely trying to make herself agreeable.

Shelley told her, it appears, that in friendship everything must be in common; and she exclaims, "few, indeed, very few, are those who know this sublime and sweet divinity; but we know it, and that is enough." "Mary," she complains, "does not write to me. Is it possible that she loves me less than the others do?"

Then she begs Shelley to come no more to the convent. Her parents wish her to see no one. But in a few days she will be delivered from this odious prison, and then will be permitted to enjoy his amiable and virtuous society. Meanwhile she must drink to the last drop the bitter cup of sorrows.

The end of the story is given by Mary, with some gusto, in a letter written in the spring of 1822: "Emilia has married Biondi; we hear that she leads him and his mother (to use a vulgarism) a devil of a life. The conclusion of our friendship (*à la* Italiana) puts me in mind of a nursery rhyme which reads thus:—

> 'As I was going down Cranbourne Lane,
> Cranbourne Lane was dirty,
> And there I met a pretty maid
> Who dropped to me a curtsey.
>
> I gave her cakes, I gave her wine,
> I gave her sugar-candy;
> But, oh! the naughty little girl,
> She asked me for some brandy.'

Now turn Cranbourne Lane into Pisan acquaintances, which, I am sure, are dirty enough, and brandy into that wherewithal to buy brandy (and that no small sum), and you have the whole story of Shelley's Italian Platonics."

Shelley himself, speaking of his "Epipsychidion," the poem which Emilia inspired, wrote also in 1822 that he could not look at it. "The person whom it celebrates was a cloud instead of a Juno; and poor Ixion starts from the Centaur that was the offspring of his own embrace. If you are curious, however, to hear what I am, and have been, it will tell you something thereof. It is an idealised history of my life and feelings. I think one is always in love with something or other; the error—and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it—consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is, perhaps, eternal."

"Epipsychidion" was written in January and February of 1821, when Shelley was at the height of his Italian Platonics. The preface seems to prove that he meant it rather for an imaginary rhapsody than for a record of his actual experience. In that preface he says that the writer of the poem had died at Florence "as he was preparing for a voyage to one of the wildest of the Sporades, which he had bought, and where he had fitted up the ruins of an old building, and where it was his hope to have realised a scheme of life, suited perhaps to that happier and better world of which he is now an inhabitant, but hardly practicable in this." "The present poem," he adds, "like the 'Vita Nuova' of Dante, is sufficiently intelligible to a certain class of readers without a matter-of-fact history of the circumstances to which it relates." When we read the poem, therefore, we should not have the real Emilia and her absurd letters and rather sordid future in mind, nor should we suppose that Shelley really intended to fly with her to "a far Eden of the purple East," nor even that he was writing his own erotic autobiography any more than he wrote it in "Alastor." The poem is another of his escapes from reality, with Emilia Viviani for a pretext. He did not work himself up into a passion for her with any idea that she should become his mistress. Rather he imagined what a passion for her might be like in the mind of a man whose life was all given up to love, and who found in her the ideal which he had been always seeking. Of course there is experience of his own in the poem, together with the expression of his own rebellious opinions. There must be experience in all good poetry. The imagination works scientifically upon a basis of knowledge. That is the difference between imagination and fancy. In "Epipsychidion" Shelley, out of his own experience of desires never satisfied, imagined a man whose whole existence had been spent in such desires and who at last had found a woman to satisfy them all. This was the point at which Shelley's imagination passed into fancy; for no woman could satisfy all the desires of a man like him, since they were desires for a state of being impossible in this life, which from time to time were all associated with the idea of the possession of some particular woman. Shelley never understood the craft and power of nature in using all the visionary faculties of man to further her own material purposes. Her end is that babies shall be born, and with that end in view, she can persuade the poet, dreaming of the Golden Age, that he will find it in the love of one woman. When he falls in love, the beauty of the woman he loves becomes for him, not only the symbol of all beauty, but the very essence of it, so that to possess it seems to him the end of existence ; and the more vast and intense have been his dreams of a golden age, the keener is his desire for the woman in whom, he thinks, they can all be realised. Shelley died before he understood, or at least before he reconciled himself to, this process of nature. He found by experience that no woman could give him the golden age, not even Mary ; but he always rebelled against that experience, and was inclined to impute his disappointments to some malign element in the universe. He wavered between the idea that somewhere he might find the woman who would bring him perfect happiness, and the idea that love was for ever thwarted and turned to bitterness by some external tyranny. He did not understand that love, like the inspiration of art, cannot be a permanent ecstasy, but rather, like art itself, will become what the lover chooses to make of it ; and that the lover, like the artist, can only make a success by reconciling himself to the imperfection of earthly conditions. He could see wonder and romance in that purpose of nature which brings a man and a woman together ; but not in that further purpose which mankind have developed beyond nature, of keeping a man and a woman together in the interests of posterity. To him the passion which produces the human race was everything ; and the discipline of that passion, for the better care of the human race, a new piece of irrational tyranny. But since he saw that, if that passion was to have results, those results must be cared for, he made up his mind that, in its perfection it would have no results, but would be a sterile thing enjoyed for its own sake. Hence his Italian Platonics, which are as fanciful and unreal as all Platonics must be. For the whole idea of Platonic love is based upon a rebellion against nature. Reality has nothing to do with sterile passions ; and they can only be a useless torment to the man who tries to experience them. Thus, in so far as "Epipsychidion" is an attempt to represent a sterile passion and the perfect happiness produced by it, it is a mere exercise of the fancy. Happiness does not come, and in no conceivable state of being could come, from sterile passions. But, in so far as the poem is an expression of Shelley's passionate sense of beauty, it is a work of imagination, and has therefore itself both beauty and value. For though we must reconcile ourselves to the purposes of nature and to the imperfections of this life, yet there is a divine impulse in us to improve upon that imperfection and to apply the purposes of nature to that improvement; and that impulse is strengthened by all beautiful expressions of it, however imperfect or one-sided they may be. Shelley's impulse was the more intense because it was narrow and took but little account of most of the conditions of this life. He said himself in a letter: "'Epipsychidion' is a mystery; as to real flesh and blood, you know that I do not deal in those articles; you might as well go to a gin-shop for a leg of mutton as expect anything human or earthly from me." Thus he was aware of his natural tendency to escape from reality, and probably encouraged it for the purposes of his art. "Epipsychidion" reminds one of the most ecstatic poems of the seventeenth century, the "Anniversaries" of Donne or the sacred rhapsodies of Crashaw. There are passages in it which recall Donne's casuistry about love, not only in the matter but in the form, so much that one is inclined to believe Shelley must have read Donne.

Here is an instance:—[1]

> "Mind from its object differs most in this:
> Evil from good, misery from happiness;
> The baser from the nobler; the impure
> And frail, from what is clear and must endure.
> If you divide suffering and dross, you may
> Diminish till it is consumed away;

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[1] I do not know of any mention by Shelley of Donne in any of his letters or other writings; but Leigh Hunt, in one of his letters to Shelley, asks him whether he has ever read Donne.

If you divide pleasure and love and thought,
Each part exceeds the whole; and we know not
How much, while any yet remains unshared,
Of pleasure may be gained, of sorrow spared."

And here is another very Donnish couplet :—

"True love in this differs from gold and clay,
That to divide is not to take away."

All these lines are written in a homelier language than Shelley was wont to use, and some cancelled passages of the poem seem to prove that he began to write it with a half satirical intention which he cast off as he was drawn more and more into rhapsody. Here is one of them :—

"If I were one whom the loud world held wise,
I should disdain to quote authorities
In commendation of this kind of love:
Why there is first the God in heaven above,
Who wrote a book called Nature, 'tis to be
Reviewed, I hear, in the next *Quarterly;*
And Socrates, the Jesus Christ of grace,
And Jesus Christ himself, did never cease
To urge all living things to love each other,
And to forget their mutual faults, and smother
The Devil of disunion in their souls."

Here Shelley is inclined to be naughty ; but no doubt he saw it was dangerous to talk about nature in connection with anything so unnatural as the sterile passion which he was trying to glorify.

In the poem itself there is one passage written in this strain :—

"I never was attached to that great sect
Whose doctrine is, that each one shall select
Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend,
And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend
To cold oblivion, though it is in the code
Of modern morals, and the beaten road
Which those poor slaves with weary footsteps tread,

> Who travel to their home among the dead
> By the broad highway of the world, and so,
> With one chained friend, perhaps a jealous foe,
> The dreariest and the longest journey go."

Here he seems to tell us that he is, like many men, naturally polygamous.

There are three fragmentary drafts of the preface in existence, and in one of these he describes his hero as "accompanied by a lady supposed to be his wife, and an effeminate-looking youth to whom he showed an attachment so singular as to give rise to the suspicion that she was a woman. At his death this suspicion was confirmed." He also says that it was his hero's intention to retire to one of the Sporades and there "to dedicate the remainder of his life to undisturbed intercourse with his companions." Among the cancelled fragments of the poem is one connected with this cancelled preface:—

> "And as to friend or mistress, 'tis a form;
> Perhaps I wish you were one. Some declare
> You a familiar spirit, as you are;
> Others with a   more inhuman
> Hint that, though not my wife, you are a woman.
> What is the colour of your eyes and hair?
> Why, if you were a lady, it were fair
> The world should know—but, as I am afraid,
> The *Quarterly* would bait you if betrayed;
> And if, as it will be sport to see them stumble
> Over all sorts of scandals, hear them mumble
> Their litany of curses—some guess right,
> And others swear you're a Hermaphrodite."

All this goes to prove that Shelley was in a fantastic mood when he started to write "Epipsychidion," and gradually worked himself into one of complete seriousness, dropping the fiction of the lady disguised as a youth, the polygamous intentions of the hero, and those passages which were obviously written to annoy the orthodox. I say that he worked himself into this mood because the rapture of the poem seems to me to be increased and prolonged by art. Shelley, with his wonderful mastery of verse, and his boundless stock of images gathered from all the objects and ideas in which he took delight, found it as easy, as if he were a musician, to spin out his raptures; and indeed the poem reminds one of a *virtuoso* piece written for the violin by a great composer. Such pieces entrance us when a great *virtuoso* plays them, and "Epipsychidion" can entrance a reader who is in the right mood for it. But more than most poems it is at the mercy of the reader's moods, and its music will not lull to sleep the reason of many readers who have lost their youth. It is well enough when Shelley tells us of the being whom his spirit met—

> "In the clear golden prime of my youth's dawn,
> Upon the fairy isles of sunny lawn,
> Amid the enchanted mountains, and the caves
> Of divine sleep, and on the air-like waves
> Of wonder-level dream, whose tremulous floor
> Paved her light steps;—on an imagined shore,
> Under the gray beak of some promontory
> She met me, robed in such exceeding glory,
> That I beheld her not. In solitudes
> Her voice came to me through the whispering winds,
> And from the fountains and the odours deep
> Of flowers, which, like lips murmuring in their sleep
> Of the sweet kisses which had lulled them there,
> Breathed but of her to the enamoured air;
> And from the breezes whether low or loud,
> And from the rain of every passing cloud,
> And from the singing of the summer-birds,
> And from all sounds, all silence. In the words
> Of antique verse and high romance,—in form,
> Sound, colour,—in whatever checks that storm
> Which with the shattered present chokes the past;
> And in that best philosophy, whose taste
> Makes this cold common hell, our life, a doom
> As glorious as a fiery martyrdom."

The last three lines startle one with their likeness to the rhapsodies of Crashaw, though expressing a creed that seems so different from his. But it is natural to the purely lyrical poet in youth, whatever his creed may be, to think that this life would be a cold hell unless it were warmed with his desires. There is the same emotion in Crashaw's poems about St. Theresa as in "Epipsychidion." Both poets talk about fiery martyrdom, and in both we can enjoy the expression of what is a real passion for perfection, a real experience that we have all shared to some extent in our youth. But we cannot, most of us, follow Shelley in his Platonics any more than his wife could follow him :—

"The day is come, and thou wilt fly with me.
To whatso'er of dull mortality
Is mine, remain a vestal sister still;
To the intense, the deep, the imperishable,
Not mine but me, henceforth be thou united
Even as a bride, delighting and delighted."

For we do not believe in such unions, either in fact or as belonging to a just ideal. The poem ends, of course, with the promise of a voyage to an isle under Ionian skies :—

"Beautiful as a wreck of Paradise."

And this line might describe the whole poem. It is as beautiful as a Paradise that has been wrecked over and over again by experience; so that we cannot believe it would be secure in any possible state of being, and our imaginations will not consent to entertain it.

CHAPTER XII

"THE DEFENCE OF POETRY" AND SHELLEY'S ÆSTHETICS

SHELLEY had scarcely finished "Epipsychidion" when he was provoked by an article of Peacock's called "The Four Ages of Poetry," to write his own "Defence of Poetry." The main purpose of Peacock's article was to prove that poetry had become obsolete, and he tried to prove it by an attack upon the poets of his own time. There is some casual truth in his argument, but more systematic perversity. Poetry begins, he says, with an Age of Iron, in which poets sing rude songs about the rapine of the heroes of their own time.[1] Then follows the Age of Gold, which finds its materials in the Age of Iron and romanticises that age and its heroes; then the Age of Silver, which is imitative in epic and original in comic, didactic, and satiric poetry; and lastly the Age of Brass, which rejects the polish and learning of the Age of Silver, and tries to revive the spontaneity of the Age of Gold.

Homer and Shakespeare represent the Age of Gold; the poets of the Augustan age and the English eighteenth century, the Age of Silver; the poets of the decline of the Roman Empire and the modern romantics, the Age of Brass. The best part of the essay is the attack on these romantics, and on the Lake Poets in particular. These poets, says Peacock, hold that the way to bring poetical genius to perfection is to cultivate poetical impressions exclusively. Such impressions can only be received among natural scenes, for all that is artificial is anti-poetical. The mountains are natural, therefore they will live among the mountains, "passing the whole day in the innocent and amiable occupation of going up and down hill, receiving poetical impressions, and communicating them in immortal verse to admiring generations." Here Peacock does touch the weakness of the romantic poets; for they are apt to specialise too much, not in the practice of their art—for all artists must do that—but in their way of living. The main defect of all modern art is that it concerns itself too much with effects and too little with causes, too much with emotions and too little with what arouses them. Hence its tendency to be irrational, and to rely upon the least rational cause of emotions, namely, associations. One of the distinguishing marks of the romantic movement is its use of associations, a use which has its dangers as well as its delights. The romantic poets were apt to turn from the stubborn present to a past whose associations were more tractable because less familiar. Of this past they could make what they chose, and often they made something very beautiful of it. But they were inclined to insist too much upon its furniture, upon mediæval or oriental properties, and too little upon the great actions and passions that are the proper subject-matter of poetry. Thus there was some truth in Peacock's description of the romantic poetry as "A modern antique compound of frippery and barbarism, in which the puling sentimentality of the present time is grafted upon the misrepresented ruggedness of the past." But from the faults of modern poetry he proceeded to argue that all poetry is obsolete. "A poet in our times," he says, "is a semi-barbarian in a civilised community. He lives in the days that are past. His ideas, thoughts, feelings, associations, are all with barbarous manners, obsolete customs, and exploded superstitions." "The highest inspirations of poetry can never make a philosopher, nor a statesman, nor in any class of life a useful or rational man." Assuming that poetry gives pleasure, he says that we have enough of it already, and that it can now be only cultivated to the neglect of some branch of useful study.

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[1] No doubt Peacock was thinking of this kind of poetry when he wrote his famous verses:—

"The mountain sheep are sweeter,
But the valley sheep are fatter."

It has no resemblance to any primitive poetry that I ever read, and his account of such poetry was mainly invented to suit his theory.

Opinions of this kind are very commonly held now, if not so openly expressed. But they are held, not by "intellectuals," but only by the ignorant, who suppose that the nature of man has been changed by mechanical inventions, that his proper business is to rush about the world as fast as possible, and his proper amusement to look at cinematoscopes or to listen to gramophones. Peacock's article is interesting because it is one of the earliest expressions of such opinions. We can see its fallacies easily enough now. We can see that his mechanical theory of poetry might be applied to everything else; and that if poetry is obsolete, so, for the same reasons, is the more civilised part of mankind. The arguments for committing suicide are just as strong as those for not writing or reading any more poetry. But Peacock's attack upon poetry seemed novel when he made it, though it was really of the same nature as the attacks which Sidney answered in his "Apology for Poetry"; and Shelley's Defence is very like Sidney's Apology.

Both have this defect—that they labour too much to prove the utility of poetry. Sidney says that the poet is the monarch of all sciences; Shelley, that poets "were called, in the earlier epochs of the world, legislators or prophets," and that "a poet essentially comprises and unites both these characters." Much beautiful poetry cannot be defended thus. Shakespeare, for instance, had nothing of the character of either a legislator or a prophet when he wrote "Othello." Shelley was too much inclined, perhaps, to insist upon the utility of poetry, because he often used it to express his own "passion for reforming the world." In the last hundred years we have made a great advance in æsthetics, though not in the practice of the arts; and a modern defender of poetry, versed in modern æsthetics, would begin his defence by insisting upon one point which Shelley never clearly makes. He would say that poetry, and indeed all art, is the expression of emotion by means which communicate that emotion to the artist's public, and that art justifies its existence when it thus communicates emotion. For the experience of emotion is an end in itself, is, in fact, the chief end of existence. Upon that every one is really agreed, except those who find the end of existence in the satisfaction of appetites. It makes no difference whether or no we regard this life as subordinate to another. Even the most austere Puritan only denies himself emotion now that he may be the more sure of enjoying it in heaven. His quarrel with the artist is that he impiously pretends to provide us with a heaven here and now. The Puritan theory is that everything in this life is only a means to an end, and that the means are quite different from the end. We may agree with his first proposition without agreeing with his second. We may hope to go to heaven, and yet hold that we shall best train ourselves for the emotions of heaven through the experience of noble emotions in this life.

There is the further objection that all the emotions expressed in art are not noble. To answer this we must distinguish between what is represented in a work of art and the emotions that are expressed and communicated through representation. Many things may be represented in a work of art that are not noble in themselves, and yet be subordinate to the expression and communication of noble emotions. In the same way ugly things may be represented in a work of art, and yet, if it is a work of art at all, it must be beautiful as a whole. Emotion can only express itself beautifully in terms of art. The beauty of a work of art is the proof that emotion has been successfully expressed in it, and the means by which that emotion is communicated. Further, ignoble emotions cannot be expressed in terms of beauty, and therefore cannot be communicated by means of art. This is a dogmatic statement, but I think that a study of actual works of art will confirm it. It may be that certain works of art may provoke lust; but, in so far as they are works of art, they are not expressions of lust. In so far as they have beauty, they express emotions which have nothing to do with lust. A painter may represent a beautiful woman in such a way as to provoke lust. But to paint a beautiful object is not to make a beautiful picture. The beauty of a work of art is independent of the beauty of the objects represented in it. It is the expression of the emotion aroused in the artist by those objects, and, if they arouse only appetite in him, he cannot express that appetite beautifully—that is to say, in terms of art.

The Puritanic or utilitarian objections to art are always the result of insensibility to art. A Puritan sees a picture of a woman which excites his desires. He thinks that because it seems to him very like a woman it must be a work of art, and, therefore, he condemns it as a work of art. But perhaps it has no beauty, and, therefore, is not a work of art at all. Again, a great artist may use the figures of beautiful women as a means of expressing emotions which have nothing to do with appetites. In that case his work will be beautiful. But a Puritan, insensible to its beauty, will see only a representation of beautiful women, which, since that representation does not communicate any emotion to him, he will regard as a mere incentive to lust. The utilitarian objections to art may be answered in the same way. Art is useless to those who are insensible to its beauty, as music is useless to a deaf man. But if mankind ever grows altogether indifferent to art, and art therefore becomes obsolete, it will be because of men's degeneracy, not because of their progress.

Shelley's purpose was to answer utilitarian objections to poetry; and his answer has this defect, that he judges it too much himself by utilitarian standards. He does not make a clear distinction between art and the rest of man's activities, because he does not seem to have grasped the fact that art is and must be the expression of emotion. He is very near to grasping it when, at the beginning of his essay, he says that "Reason is the enumeration of quantities already known; imagination is the perception of the value of these quantities, both separately and as a whole." For emotions are the test of the values of things, and the artist, in expressing his emotions, expresses and communicates his sense of values. Shelley gives the following explanation of the form of poetry: "Sounds as well as thoughts have relation both between each other and towards that which they represent, and a perception of the order of these relations has always been found connected with a perception of the order of the relations of thoughts. Hence the language of poets has ever affected a certain uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound, without which it were not poetry, and which is scarcely less indispensable to the communication of its influence than the words themselves without reference to that peculiar order." He might have put this more clearly if he had explained that sound in poetry does not usually represent anything, but is a means of expressing emotion. If we include under sound all that in poetry delights the ear—that is to say, all the attributes of versification—we may say that sound does not communicate ideas but only emotions; and that its relation to sense is this, that it communicates the emotions proper to the sense. Shelley does not seem to have thoroughly grasped the fact that the form of verse is not a mere ornament but an added means of expression, for he says that the distinction between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error. "Plato," he tells us, "was essentially a poet—the truth and splendour of his imagery, and the melody of his language, are the most intense that it is possible to conceive. He rejected the measure of the epic, dramatic, and lyrical forms, because he sought to kindle a harmony in thoughts divested of shape and action, and he forbore to invent any regular plan of rhythm which would include, under determinate forms, the varied pauses of his style." Rather, I would say, Plato wrote in prose because his main purpose was to reason, and whatever emotion he expressed was subsidiary to that purpose. All beautiful prose has emotion in it, just as all good verse has reason in it; but when reason is subsidiary to emotion, verse is the right means of expression, and, when emotion to reason, prose. There are works, of course, like the Book of Job, in which we cannot be sure which purpose is predominant, and these works are usually something between poetry and prose. But though white may be gradually shaded through grey into black, yet there is certainly an essential difference between black and white; and so there is between prose and poetry. Shelley says that "the parts of a composition may be poetical, without the composition as a whole being a poem." That happens when a writer's expression of emotion is incidental and subordinate to some prosaic purpose. But Shelley will have it that every great writer is a poet. "All the great historians," he says, "Herodotus, Plutarch, Livy, were poets," because their works contain poetic passages. But he adds that "the plan of these writers, especially that of Livy, restrained them from developing this faculty in its highest degree." That is to say their main purpose was not poetical, and, therefore, they wrote prose.

Shelley, like Coleridge, insists that "Poetry is ever accompanied with pleasure," and that "all spirits on which it falls open themselves to receive the wisdom which is mingled with its delight." There is some danger in the argument that poetry sweetens wisdom, as jam sweetens powder; for it will not cover much beautiful poetry, and it will not cover music at all, unless we use wisdom in some new and vague sense. Shelley is on surer ground when he tells us more particularly, in an eloquent passage, how poetry works upon the mind of man for good. How it puts us in love with things by quickening our imaginations, for, without imagination, we cannot love well. "Poetry," he says, "strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb."

"The Defence of Poetry" contains many other eloquent passages, and some reasoning that is both subtle and profound. But there is no clear statement of first principles in it. Shelley seems to be wavering between the old æsthetics and the new. At one time he claims for poetry a utility apart from its beauty; at another he seems to hold that beauty has its own justification and utility. Thus his argument is not quite continuous, and sometimes he gives us only eloquence when we are expecting the conclusion of an argument. In this, as in other controversial works, he seems often to write rather for those who do not need convincing than for those who do. He had a great power of close reasoning; but when he wrote prose, like many poets in the same case, he could not rid his mind of poetic habits. He forgot that his main purpose was to reason, and fell to expressing his emotions as if he were writing poetry. Matthew Arnold, in one of those fits of perversity to which the best critics are liable, spoke of Shelley's prose works and of his letters as if he valued them more than his verse. It is not likely that, but for his verse, his prose would ever be read now; for, though it is fluent and ingenious, it has one fatal defect—it lacks character. In his prose Shelley expressed only his opinions, not himself and his own experience. His character and his experience are of a kind that could only be expressed in verse, for both were made up mainly of emotions. He was more extremely a poet, perhaps, than any man that ever lived, because life to him was all emotion; and when he was not experiencing emotion, the higher faculties of his mind were not employed. His very reason only worked at its fullest power when it was fired by emotion, and his greatest intellectual feats were performed in lyrical poetry. He could not subordinate emotion to reason, and therefore he was never in that state of mind when strong emotion is controlled by stronger reason, which produces the greatest prose. This excessive predominance of emotion in his mind caused him to be wanting in curiosity. He was but little interested in things or people for their own sake. He judged everything according to his own ideals, and never allowed those ideals to be affected by facts. Thus he could not understand the interest of other poets in circumstance and character; and in his "Defence of Poetry" he gives an ingenious explanation of this interest. He is discussing the reason why poets have represented character remote from moral perfection, and he says that "A poet considers the vices of his contemporaries as the temporary dress in which his creations must be arrayed, and which cover without concealing the eternal proportions of their beauty." "Few poets of the highest class have chosen to exhibit the beauty of their conceptions in its naked truth and splendour; and it is doubtful whether the alloy of costume, habit, &c., be not necessary to temper this planetary music for mortal ears." Here he has advanced beyond the neo-classic theory that nothing should be represented in art which is not beautiful or noble in itself according to neo-classic standards of nobility and beauty. But he still falls short of any theory that will justify the art which delights in the representation of character for its own sake, or will explain why that art is beautiful. Artists such as Shakespeare or Rembrandt do not use the alloy of costume, habit, &c., so as to temper their planetary music to mortal ears, but because they are profoundly interested in all the imperfection of this life, and because the promise of that imperfection moves them to deep emotion. Shelley himself seems almost to grasp this fact when he says that "The beauty of the internal nature cannot be so far concealed by its accidental vesture but that the spirit of its form shall communicate itself to the very disguise, and indicate the shape it hides from the manner in which it is worn."

But even here he fails to distinguish between the beauty of a work of art and the beauty of what is represented in it. The artist can make a beautiful work of art out of the representation of things not beautiful in themselves, provided those things move him to emotion and he expresses that emotion in his art. Shakespeare and Rembrandt could love people and things altogether imperfect in themselves, and could therefore represent them in terms of beauty. Shakespeare also could take delight in the conflict of good and evil in this life as being part of its necessary imperfection, and as containing all the infinite promise of that imperfection. He could therefore represent evil with as much zest as good; and he admired power in evil, as, for instance, the cunning and constancy of Iago, because he held power in itself to be good, and to retain some of its virtue even when perverted by the imperfect conditions of this life. But to Shelley power, when evilly used, was evil in itself; and he could take no disinterested delight in it, but could only represent it, without understanding, as a foil to good. He was so much repelled by it that he could no more observe it coolly than most of us could observe a man being broken on the wheel. Again, Shakespeare, having a joyful sense of the imperfection of this life, saw promise and significance in the very follies and weaknesses of mankind. Hence that good-natured humour of his, which has the joy of art, and therefore the beauty of art, in its expression. But, since Shelley had no joyful sense of the imperfection of this life, he had no humour, but only high spirits. Therefore his æsthetic theory takes no account of humour, except as an alloy to temper planetary music. He himself condemned comedy as cruel. He thought that no one could make fun of follies and weaknesses without hating them or despising the weak and foolish. He had a strong abstract faith in mankind and the future of the universe; but it remained always abstract, and based rather upon opinions than upon facts, and he hated all facts that seemed to him to contradict it. Thus he was no more fitted to write prose than Correggio was fitted to paint portraits, and there is the same kind of emptiness in his prose, for all its facility, as in those paintings of Correggio which want lyrical fire.

CHAPTER XIII

"ADONAIS" AND "HELLAS"

EARLY in 1821 Shelley made the acquaintance of Edward Williams and his wife Jane, with whom he was in close friendship till the end of his life. Williams was a lieutenant of dragoons, now on half pay, and a friend of Medwin. He had first been in the navy, but "detested the tyranny practised on men-of-war." He was a year or two younger than Shelley, and seems to have been a man of simple and charming character. His wife also was charming, and played well enough on the guitar to delight Shelley. Mary said that she was very pretty, but wanted animation. Shelley appears not to have found this fault in her, although he said that she was not very clever. He addressed several famous poems to her; and in after years she seems to have represented that she understood Shelley better than Mary understood him, and even that Mary vexed him with causeless jealousies. When Mary discovered this there was an end of close friendship, though no open quarrel, between them.

From May to October, 1821, the Shelleys were again at San Giuliano, with the Williamses a few miles away. Keats died at Rome on February 23, and Shelley was moved to indignation by the story, false but commonly believed, that he had been killed by the article on "Endymion" in the *Quarterly Review*. In June he wrote "Adonais," his elegy on the death of Keats. He and Keats had never been close friends, and he seems to have had no great admiration for any of Keats's poems except "Hyperion." In the others he found only promise. But he had been eager in offers of service to Keats, for he saw that Keats was a poet devoted to his art; and in "Adonais" he wrote of the glory of that art, and the mystery of death, as much as of Keats himself. It is no more an expression of personal grief than "Lycidas"; but this is no defect, for Shelley makes no pretence in it of any emotion he does not feel. He uses the classical machinery, as Milton used it, so that he may connect his theme with the great poetic tradition of the world; so that he may represent Keats as one of a long series of poets, all natives of the same enchanted country and all children of the same mother, Urania.

Many conventions of art have been discredited, because they have been used by unimaginative men to conceal their want of imagination. How many painters have painted draperies rather than clothes, because draperies were supposed to belong to imaginative painting. How many versifiers have written pastorals for the same reason. Yet Raphael, when he painted draperies, knew what he was about; and so did Milton, when he wrote pastorals. Each of these great artists removed his work from the plane of immediate reality because he wished to represent a state of being belonging, not to a particular age, but to all time; because the peculiarities of his age were not relevant to his theme. So it was with Shelley, when he wrote "Adonais." He was not concerned with the fact that his poet was called John Keats, that he was the son of a man who kept a livery stable, or that he had been an assistant in a chemist's shop. These were mere accidents of his theme. The essence was the death of a young poet, misunderstood by the world, and the emotions which that event stirred in Shelley's mind. But however much an artist may abstract actual circumstances from his theme, he cannot do without circumstances altogether unless he is a musician; for there must be some amount of representation in the other arts of expression. Shelley's poetry comes very near to music; but still it is poetry, since words are his medium of expression, and therefore even in his most lyrical poems he must use words to represent something. In "Adonais" he has to represent some state of being, with some relation to reality, since he is writing of an actual event and a real man. He cannot start off with Keats "pinnacled dim in the intense inane"; for, if he did, no one would know what he was talking about. Therefore he chose to represent a state of being as far removed from actual circumstance as possible, yet by long tradition closely associated with his theme. Poets have so often been written of as shepherds that we are not puzzled by Shelley's pastoral allusions, and, at the same time, these pastoral allusions are not introduced as mere substitutes for imagination. Indeed, Shelley uses them rather as imagery than as local colour, and by doing so prevents them from being irrelevant. He seems to begin the poem with a ritual chant, varied and repeated through many stanzas, as becomes one poet making solemn music for the funeral of another. But gradually the music becomes more individual, and Shelley's own peculiar imagination expresses itself in the first pastoral allusion:—

> "Oh, weep for Adonais!—The quick Dreams,
> The passion-winged ministers of thought,
> Who were his flocks, whom near the living streams
> Of his young spirit he fed, and whom he taught
> The love which was its music, wander not,—
> Wander no more, from kindling brain to brain,
> But droop there, whence they sprung; and mourn their lot
> Round the cold heart, where, after their sweet pain,
> They ne'er will gather strength, or find a home again."

For Shelley thoughts and emotions and the voices of the earth and sky were as real as men and women, and all these have the same kind of reality in "Adonais" as in "Prometheus." In fact he empties some things of their particularities only to make other things more real, and thus his abstract method is justified. It seems natural to us, with our minds quickened by Shelley's music, that the inspirations of the poet should mourn for him, and that their moving pomp should be compared to the—

> "Pageantry of mist on an autumnal stream."

Shelley, like a great composer, creates a world of his own with the power of his music, in which old myths seem to be new; and there is nothing frigid in the lines—

"Lost Echo sits amid the voiceless mountains,
And feeds her grief with his remembered lay,
And will no more reply to winds or fountains,
Or amorous birds perched on the young green spray";

or in the description of Urania coming from her secret Paradise to mourn over her son in his death-chamber; or in the appearance of Byron, Moore, Leigh Hunt, and Shelley himself transformed yet recognisable as mountain shepherds. Shelley's description of himself is as good an example as could be found of ideal poetry, for it conveys a just idea of him without any statements of actual fact:—

"'Midst others of less note, came one frail Form,
A phantom among men; companionless
As the last note of an expiring storm
Whose thunder is its knell; he, as I guess,
Had gazed on nature's naked loveliness,
Actaeon-like, and now he fled astray
With feeble steps o'er the world's wilderness,
And his own thoughts, along that rugged way,
Pursued, like raging hounds, their father and their prey.

A pard-like Spirit beautiful and swift—
A Love in desolation masked;—a Power
Girt round with weakness;—it can scarce uplift
The weight of the superincumbent hour;
It is a dying lamp, a falling shower,
A breaking billow;—even whilst we speak
Is it not broken? On the withering flower
The killing sun smiles brightly; on a cheek
The life can burn in blood, even while the heart may break.

His head was bound with pansies over-blown,
And faded violets, white, and pied, and blue;
And a light spear topped with a cypress cone,
Round whose rude shaft dark ivy-tresses grew

Yet dripping with the forest's noonday dew,
Vibrated, as the ever-beating heart
Shook the weak hand that grasped it; of that crew
He came the last, neglected and apart:
A herd-abandoned deer, struck by the hunter's dart."

Here Shelley seems to be making myths about himself and his own poetry, using the Greek mythology figuratively as he used the pastoral convention when he spoke of Keats. The thoughts of Keats were his flocks, his own are hounds that pursue him. Then the myth dissolves into pure metaphor, and then it forms again, revealing him as a kind of Bacchus who has lost his power but not his beauty, and wanders through a world that does not know him. But these myths and images give us a clearer idea of Shelley's nature and genius than any number of actual facts. He tells us that—

"In the accents of an unknown land
He sung new sorrow; sad Urania scanned
The stranger's mien, and murmured: 'Who art thou?'"

So strange and new was his music that even Urania, the mother of poets, did not recognise him for her son. It was no wonder that men took time to be aware of its sweetness and meaning.

At the fortieth stanza there is a change in the poem. The pastoral convention drops away from it, and it becomes a hymn to the glory of art and the mystery of death:—

"He has outsoared the shadow of our night;
Envy and calumny and hate and pain,
And that unrest which men miscall delight,
Can touch him not and torture not again."

The burden, "O, weep for Adonais," changes to—

"Mourn not for Adonais.—Thou young Dawn,
Turn all thy dew to splendour, for from thee
The spirit thou lamentest is not gone."

As to the nature of immortality Shelley is uncertain, but he is filled with an immense hope. He seems at one moment to be satisfied with a kind of Pantheism; but then his imagination makes his faith stronger and clearer, and he tells us how "the inheritors of unfulfilled renown," welcoming their "new-admired guest"—

"Rose, robed in dazzling immortality.
'Thou art become as one of us,' they cry;
It was for thee yon kingless sphere has long
Swung blind in unascended majesty,
Silent alone amid an heaven of song,
Assume thy wingèd throne, thou Vesper of our throng!"

Never did the new music, strange even to Urania, sound with so much wonder and power as in this verse. Here Shelley makes a new kind of myth, altogether free from all earthly circumstance, in which imagery convinces us that it is fact, since it tells us of new things that could only come to the poet's mind or be conveyed to ours in images. There follows a strange verse in which Shelley, as elsewhere, seems to grow dizzy with the height to which he has soared and yet to nerve himself for a farther flight.

"Who mourns for Adonais? Oh, come forth,
Fond wretch! and know thyself and him aright.
Clasp with thy panting soul the pendulous earth;
As from a centre, dart thy spirit's light
Beyond all worlds, until its spacious might
Satiate the void circumference: then shrink
Even to a point within our day and night;
And keep thy heart light, lest it make thee sink
When hope has kindled hope, and lured thee to the brink."

Here he seems to be passing beyond all imagery in the effort to express naked thoughts that cannot be clothed in words; but imagery returns triumphantly in the famous lines—

"The One remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven's light for ever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments."

This image also conveys a new truth that could not be divorced from it, for it is a truth conceived only by the co-operation of intellect and emotion, and therefore not to be expressed except by the same co-operation—that is to say, in an image. The poem ends in a prophecy of Shelley's own approaching fate. His mind has seen so far into eternity that it can no longer be satisfied with time, and is carried into the future by the momentum of its inspiration—

"The breath whose might I have invoked in song
Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven,
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
Whose sails were never to the tempest given;
The massy earth and sphered skies are riven!
I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar;
Whilst burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,
The soul of Adonais, like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are."

"Adonais" seems to me the most perfect poem of any length that Shelley ever wrote, because in it he found the subject most suited to his genius. It combines music with abstract ideas as they have never been combined before or since. It is as perfect in form as in matter, for it starts with a familiar theme, and only gradually and by a natural process takes us into the unknown, moving from the ancient pastoral country of poetry to Shelley's own untrodden wildernesses and airy heights of thought. He himself called it the least imperfect of his compositions, and a highly-wrought piece of art; and yet he could write soon afterwards, and with "Adonais" in his mind: "The decision of the cause, whether or no I am a poet, is removed from the present time to the hour when our posterity shall assemble; but the court is a very severe one, and I fear that the verdict will be 'Guilty—death.'" This was not mock modesty, but the natural diffidence of a great artist when he compares his work, not with the works of other artists, but with what he would wish it to be himself. This diffidence passed away, and a few months later he wrote with just pride, " I confess I should be surprised if *that* poem were born to an immortality of oblivion."

At the beginning of August Shelley went to see Byron at Ravenna, who, under the influence of the Countess Guiccioli, had now purged and was living cleanly like a gentleman. Byron told him that Elise, the dismissed Swiss maid, probably at the instigation of her husband, had slandered him grossly to the Hoppners. Her story was that Shelley had got Claire with child, and had then given her a violent medicine to procure abortion; that in spite of this a child had been born, which Shelley had immediately sent to a foundling hospital; also that he neglected and beat Mary. All this he related in a letter to Mary with this comment:—

" As to what reviews and the world say, I do not care a jot; but when persons who have known me are capable of conceiving of me—not that I have fallen into a great error, as would have been the living with Claire as my mistress—but that I have committed such unutterable crimes as destroying or abandoning a child, and that my own! Imagine my despair of good! Imagine how it is possible that one of so weak and sensitive a nature as mine can run further the gauntlet through this hellish society of men."

Shelley did not understand that these great errors often lead to the unutterable crimes which he distinguished so sharply and rightly from them; and that this is the reason why people are too ready to believe any slander about those who, they think, have broken the moral laws of society. Still, he was falsely accused, and his indignation was natural. He asked Mary to write a letter to the Hoppners refuting the charge. Mary at once wrote a fine letter to Mrs. Hoppner in which, after dealing with the slander, she took occasion to speak of the perfect confidence and affection which existed between her and her husband, ending with some reproaches to Mrs. Hoppner for believing such a tale about Shelley and Claire, and for repeating it to Byron. Byron acted badly throughout the affair. He professed to the Hoppners to believe the story and then repeated it to Shelley, although he had promised Mr. Hoppner not to do so. Thus he was in a difficulty when Shelley gave him Mary's letter under promise that he would send it on to Mrs. Hoppner. If he did this he would have to confess that he had told Shelley what he had promised not to tell. He was not a man, as Shelley said, to keep a secret good or bad; but still Shelley trusted him more than he deserved, for he never sent the letter on to Mrs. Hoppner, and it was found among his papers after his death. The only thing that can be said for him, which is not much, is that he did not destroy it. We may take it that he put off the disagreeable task of sending it on and making his confession to the Hoppners, until it slipped out of his mind. Elise afterwards wrote to Mrs. Shelley denying that she had ever said anything to Mrs. Hoppner against Shelley or Claire. She added that she had never seen anything in the conduct of Claire that could justify any insinuations against her.

Shelley went to see the Tomb of Theodoric and the churches of Ravenna, but he was only interested in the remains of classical taste which he found in them. He had no notion that in them were the beginnings of an art as magnificent as any in the world. "It seems," he says, "to have been one of the first effects of the Christian religion, to destroy the power of producing beauty in art." This opinion is an expression, not so much of his own theological bigotry as of the æsthetic bigotry still general in his time. Byron read to him an unpublished canto of "Don Juan" (the fifth), and it seemed to Shelley to set him far above all the poets of the day. "I despair of rivalling Lord Byron," he said, "and there is no other with whom it is worth contending." "Lord Byron and I," he added, "are excellent friends; and were I reduced to poverty, or were I a writer who had no claims to a higher station than I possess—or did I possess a higher than I deserve,—we should appear in all things as such, and I would freely ask him any favour. Such is not now the case. The demon of mistrust and pride lurks between two persons in our situation, poisoning the freedom of our intercourse."

We do not know what were Byron's real opinions of Shelley's poetry. He said different things of it at different times and to different people. But of Shelley himself he said less evil and more good than of any other man whom he knew well. Probably Shelley was hungry for praise of his poetry from Byron—that would have consoled him for the indifference and abuse of the world—and probably Byron praised his poetry no more than he praised most things. This would be one reason for the constraint between them; another would be Byron's lack of some of the virtues which Shelley most esteemed, and Shelley's lack of just those qualities which made Byron a great man in spite of his falseness and meanness.

But though Shelley could not ask favours of Byron for himself, he could ask them for another. Leigh Hunt at this time was in great straits. He had been very ill, and his paper, the *Examiner*, had fallen low in circulation during his illness. Mrs. Hunt wrote to Mary asking that Shelley would urge her husband to come out to Italy for the good of his health. At Ravenna Shelley told Byron of Hunt's evil case, and Byron, in one of his generous fits, proposed that Leigh Hunt should come to Italy and should join himself and Shelley in a magazine in which all their future works should be published, the profits to be shared between them. Shelley refused this offer for himself, thinking that his reputation would do the venture no good, and that he was a writer of too little fame to be a partner on equal terms with the other two; but he wrote at once to Hunt to tell him of Byron's proposal. Hunt accepted it with delight, not knowing that Byron's generosity, however sincere in project, was apt to fail in performance. Byron, after much wavering, made up his mind to live for a while at Pisa, and Shelley took the Lanfranchi Palace on the Lung' Arno there for him. He came to Pisa on November 1. Shelley and Mary went into lodgings opposite to his palace. About this time Shelley was moved, by what he read in the newspapers of the War of Independence in Greece, to write his lyrical drama "Hellas." He called it in the preface "a mere improvise." It has the defects of an improvisation in its structure, and often in its execution. "The 'Persæ' of Æschylus," he says, "afforded me the first model of my conception, although the decision of the glorious contest now waging in Greece being yet suspended forbids a catastrophe parallel to the return of Xerxes and the desolation of the Persians. I have, therefore, contented myself with exhibiting a series of lyric pictures, and with having wrought upon the curtain of futurity, which falls upon the unfinished scene, such figures of indistinct and visionary delineation as suggest the final triumph of the Greek cause as a portion of the cause of civilisation and social improvement."

As a play "Hellas" is nothing. The reader can take no interest in the characters or in the succession of events. These are mere pretexts for passages of description and meditation upon human fate, or for the choruses, by two of which the work is chiefly remembered. Indeed, its chief justification is the fact that in the process of writing it Shelley was wrought up to the production of these two choruses. All poets who do not work in some popular and well-defined form of art, such as the living epic or drama, are sure to produce a great deal of waste poetry. Their inspiration is vague from the lack of a form to which they are habituated, and it expresses itself in vague and formless verse.

The romantic poets, being without practice or tradition in the larger forms of poetry, were all apt to run to waste when they attempted these larger forms. Most of "Hellas" is a lyrical example of such waste. We may regard it rather as the working of a poet's mind, preliminary to the production of a work of art, than as a work of art in itself; and we may regret that Shelley should have spent some of his energy on the attempt to present these preliminary workings as a finished work of art. It is waste to execute a half formed conception, especially if it be a conception so imperfect in its nature that it could never shape itself perfectly; and the conception of "Hellas" is of this kind. The "Persæ" of Æschylus, the most formless and occasional of Greek plays, was a dangerous model for Shelley. It tempted him to indulge his own peculiar weakness rather than incited him to aim at a new kind of excellence. Every man, however active, is subject to some kind of laziness, and Shelley, like many English artists, was lazy to this extent that he would turn too readily from the harder task of conception to the easier task of execution; also that, since revision was distasteful to him, he would always rather begin a new work than improve an old one. We may wonder at the great amount of poetry he produced in a few years, but he might have produced half as much and yet have worked harder. The test is, not how much verse a poet produces, but how much of it posterity will read. Most of the longer works of Shelley, and indeed of all the romantic poets, are but little read even by lovers of poetry except in the first happy enthusiasm of youth or for some particular purpose. You may read "Hellas" once to discover what there is in it, but you are not likely to read it again for its own sake, for it is not interesting. It contains wonderful lines and passages which the reader can mark as he comes upon them, so that he may know where to find them again. But he can enjoy them just as well without their context as with it. Such are the lines:—

> "Kings are like stars—they rise and set, they have
> The worship of the world, but no repose."

Or the passage in which the home of a shadowy Jew, Ahasuerus, is described:—

> "He who would question him
> Must sail alone at sunset, where the stream
> Of ocean sleeps around those foamless isles,
> When the young moon is westering as now,
> And evening airs wander upon the wave;
> And when the pines of that bee-pasturing isle,
> Great Erebinthus, quench the fiery shadow
> Of his gilt prow within the sapphire water,
> Then must the lonely helmsman cry aloud
> 'Ahasuerus.'"

But the two famous choruses are separate and finished works of art, and they seem to me to be the finest lyrics of their kind in our language.

The English lyric has two different origins, the one indigenous and the other foreign. It has been developed partly out of folk-song and partly under the influence of Greek or Græco-Roman models.[1] Without the folk-song origin it would have been a mere academic exercise, too far from common speech to have either character or spontaneous melody. There is not enough of the folk-song influence in the odes of Gray, and still less in the Pindarics of Cowley. But a poet who is a master of folk-song—that is to say, of the art of making simple music out of simple language—may greatly increase the power and diversity of his music, and, indeed, of all his means of expression, if he can submit himself skilfully to the classical influence.

Folk-song is, as it were, the music of a single voice. The great classical lyrics are choral or even orchestral. They have a great variety of music; for in them the Latin and more abstract elements of our language can be freely used, and the structure of the sentences can be almost as elaborate and diverse as in eloquent prose. They are also instruments for the expression of emotions more various and more intellectual, such as the emotions aroused by general ideas; and they are even capable of expressing general ideas themselves.

We may find the beginnings of the classical lyric, perhaps, in Spenser's "Epithalamium." It has been wonderfully developed by Crashaw, and rises almost to its perfection in Milton's "Blest Pair of Syrens." It begins to grow pedantic in Dryden's odes, is degraded into vulgar nonsense by Pope, rises again in the odes of Gray and Collins, becomes natural in those of Wordsworth, and is perfected by Shelley in the two great choruses of "Hellas," "Worlds on worlds are rolling over," and "The world's great age begins anew." The classical influence came to Spenser, to Crashaw, and perhaps to Milton mainly through Italian poetry. To

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[1] Of course the influence of French and Italian poetry has also been strong in most periods of our literature.

Wordsworth it probably came through Milton. To Shelley it came straight from the classics, and he used it with a Greek lucidity and sonority, and yet with all the native music of the language, to express general ideas that had never before been expressed in lyric poetry:—

"Swift as the radiant shapes of sleep
  From one whose dreams are Paradise
Fly, when the fond wretch wakes to weep,
  And Day peers forth with her blank eyes;
    So fleet, so faint, so fair,
    The Powers of earth and air
Fled from the folding-star of Bethlehem:
    Apollo, Pan, and Love,
    And even Olympian Jove,
Grew weak, for killing Truth had glared on them;
    Our hills and seas and streams,
    Dispeopled of their dreams,
Their waters turned to blood, their dew to tears,
    Wailed for the golden years."

The closing chorus is more symmetrical in its form and more simple in its theme. But the music has the same ringing clearness, the same swift yet stately movement:—

"A loftier Argo cleaves the main,
  Fraught with a richer prize;
Another Orpheus sings again,
  And loves, and weeps, and dies.
A new Ulysses leaves once more
Calypso for his native shore."

But Shelley cannot, like Virgil, sustain his song of exultant hope to the end. As in the "Ode to Liberty," he towers only to sink in a sudden descent as beautiful as his upward flight:—

"Oh cease! must hate and death return?
  Cease! must men kill and die?
Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn
  Of bitter prophecy.
The world is weary of the past,
Oh, might it die or rest at last!"

Still he dreamed of Paradise won at a stroke, and still his dreams were shattered by the remembrance of evil which to him was a hideous inexplicable fact, since he could not think of it as a phase in the process of imperfect life towards perfection.

He tells us in a note that this final chorus is "indistinct and obscure as the event of the living drama whose arrival it foretells." The ardent spirits of Isaiah and Virgil, "overleaping the actual reign of evil which we endure and bewail, already saw the possible and perhaps approaching state of society in which the 'lion shall lie down with the lamb' and 'omnis feret omnia tellus.'" Shelley himself had foretold such a state in his "Prometheus Unbound"; but now, when he was dealing with actual events, his heart failed him. He knew that the Golden Age would not come with the freedom of Greece, and therefore he ended with a cry of that despondency which overcame him from time to time. And yet he could write to Medwin about this time in language very like some famous words of Walt Whitman: "My mind is at peace respecting nothing so much as the constitution and mysteries of the great system of things—my curiosity on this point never amounts to solicitude." This peace of thought he was no doubt gradually acquiring; but it had not yet become emotional peace, and therefore could not yet be expressed in poetry. There is little peace in the many beautiful lyrics of this year. Indeed the most famous of them would sound like a cry of despair, but for its music, which is triumphant in beauty:—

> "O world! O life! O time!
> On whose last steps I climb,
> Trembling at that where I had stood before;
> When will return the glory of your prime?
> No more—oh, never more!
>
> Out of the day and night
> A joy has taken flight;
> Fresh spring, and summer, and winter hoar,
> Move my faint heart with grief, but with delight
> No more—oh, never more!"

This expresses an unfruitful emotion that comes now and again to all who are capable of great delight, when they are losing their youth. Suddenly the world seems emptied of all delight for them, and the remembrance of it torments them as if they were angels exiled from Paradise, yet with the empty show of Paradise all about them. This kind of emotion passes, and must be endured like a growing pain, as having no significance. It might therefore be argued that it should not be expressed in poetry. But here the beauty of the expression justifies it. For a beautiful work of art, however sad its theme, never dispirits. Only bad art is dreary; all good art increases our vitality, whatever its subject may be. In this poem is expressed, not merely a passing mood of depression, but Shelley's passionate struggle with that depression and his triumph over it in the act of expressing it. For the music of the words expresses rather the joy which the poet thinks he has lost for ever than his despair at the loss of that joy, and expresses it all the more keenly because he cannot for the moment experience it. Another poem of this year is the splendid "Bridal Song," of which there are two versions extant besides the final one. From this we may conclude that Shelley spent much pains upon the poem; and it is one of the most polished of all his lyrics, combining the wild music of folk-song with a classical stateliness and lucidity:—

"The golden gates of sleep unbar
  Where strength and beauty met together,
Kindle their image like a star
  In a sea of glassy weather.
Night, with all thy stars look down,—
  Darkness, weep thy holiest dew,—
Never smiled the inconstant moon
          On a pair so true.
Let eyes not see their own delight;
Haste, swift Hour, and thy flight
          Oft renew."

In this perfect union of folk-song and classical music Shelley reminds us of Ben Jonson, whom perhaps he took for his model and certainly surpassed.

There are certain poems written about this time to Jane and Edward Williams, from which we might almost suppose that Shelley had ceased to be happy with Mary. In one he says to Jane [1]—

> "When I return to my cold home, you ask
> Why I am not as I have ever been;
> You spoil me for the task
> Of acting a forced part in life's dull scene,—
> Of wearing on my brow the idle mask
> Of author, great or mean,
> In the world's carnival. I sought
> Peace thus, and but in you I found it not."

The true explanation of this and other poems, such as the famous "One word is too often profaned," is not that Shelley had ceased to love Mary or that he would have been happier away from her, but that he was by nature polygamous and did not know it. Monogamy is an ideal which men have imposed upon themselves, and with some pain and grief have made real. It is their most signal triumph over that machinery of life to which, we are often told, we must always be subject. But it is a triumph that can only be maintained by continual effort and sacrifice. Romantic people often write and talk as if it had been won once and for all; as if marriage for love made a man naturally monogamous, and after it he could not possibly fall in love with another woman without ceasing to love his wife. This is not so; for the first passion of love changes into a quiet affection which does not satisfy all the instincts of all men, particularly if, like Shelley, they are hungry for delight and before marriage have got the habit of falling in love very readily. Shelley had a strong affection for Mary; but he was used to it and to her, and he was always eager for some new delight not staled by use. He was not aware of the animal in himself, or of the manner in which nature could use his imagination to transfigure his animal instincts. Like most romantic poets he made too much of sexual love, confusing it with that ideal love of all things to which we cannot attain so long as we and all things are imperfect. Sexual love may be the beginning and prophecy of that ideal love; but since it is exclusive and the cause of much crime and sorrow, it is only a very imperfect beginning and prophecy, indeed far more imperfect than maternal love. Shelley's mind and his body alike were always hungry for passion, and, since he had dangerously idealised passion and had the romantic habit of getting his inspiration from it, he could not regard his hunger as a mere appetite that he ought to suppress in the interests both of his character and of his art. It moved him to write poetry, and therefore he indulged it by writing poetry, not seeing that he might have written better poetry by suppressing it.

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[1] The poem is addressed to Edward, but this verse appears from the context to be meant for his wife. The last verse but one has a remarkable likeness in sense to the last verse of the Stanzas written in April 1814, when the estrangement from Harriet was just begun.

There is a common modern theory that all art is an expression of the sexual instinct. I do not propose to discuss that theory now—it is usually employed by people quite ignorant of art in support of some mechanical view of life—but I will point out that, even if it be true, it does not imply that an artist should be for ever concerned with sexual matters. The greatest art of the world has not been concerned with sexual matters; and if it is indeed a result of sexual energy, it is a result altogether transfigured by the will and the ideals of the artist. The right conclusion to be drawn from this theory, by those who hold it, is that sexual energy, since nature has given it to us in superfluous abundance, may be used for other purposes than the production of children or of works of art which take the sexual instinct for their theme. It may be that its superfluity, when subject to the human will, is the chief force which men can command for the accomplishment of their ideals; and that it becomes most effective when its original purpose is changed by the human will into conformity with its ideals.

If this be so, we shall conclude that Shelley's superfluous sexual energy had only imperfectly undergone this change, and that his ideals were still imperfect—in fact, were not ideals at all, so far as they consisted of the desire for sexual satisfaction. This desire was indeed latent in many of his dreams of Paradise, and probably it was the reason why those dreams were so visionary. For, since there is no will but only instinct in that desire, it works upon the imagination to conceive only the delight of its perfect satisfaction, and not the means by which that satisfaction can be accomplished.

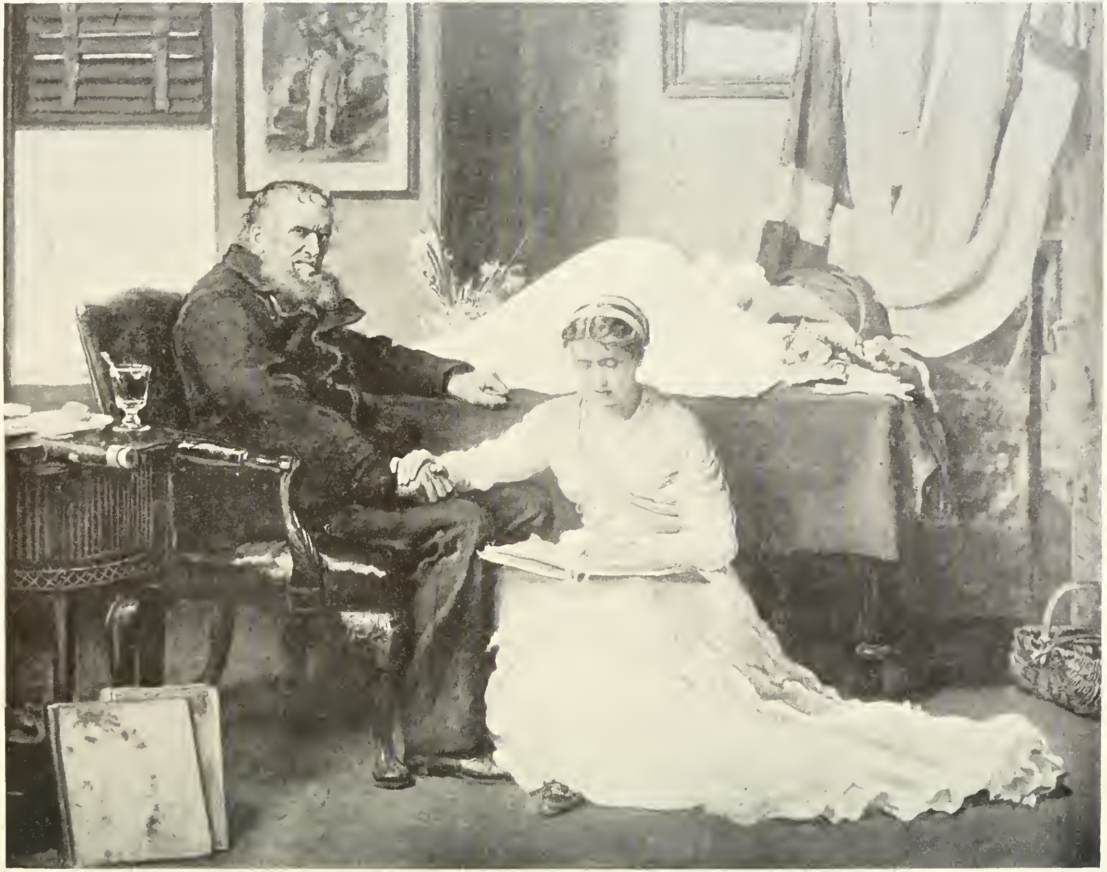
Shelley's Paradise was a place in which passion would be always new and yet always perfectly satisfied, still an appetite yet not subject to the laws of appetite. He could not imagine any means of attaining to this Paradise, for it was a mere impossibility, an incongruous mixture of present pleasure of the flesh with imagined delights of the spirit. Therefore it was separated from the world as he knew it by a gulf that his imagination could not bridge, and that he could only cross by an arbitrary flight of fancy. He saw that it was impossible, yet would not reconcile himself to its impossibility; and he was always writing poems in which he expressed both his desire for it and his despair of it. Jane Williams, like Emilia Viviani, appears to have aroused both the desire and the despair; and he expressed both in a famous poem:—

"One word is too often profaned
   For me to profane it,
One feeling too falsely disdained
   For thee to disdain it;
One hope is too like despair
   For prudence to smother,
And pity from thee is more dear
   Than that from another.

I can give not what men call love,
   But wilt thou accept not
The worship the heart lifts above
   And the heavens reject not—
The desire of the moth for the star,
   Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
   From the sphere of our sorrow?"

In prose he could speak very coolly of Jane; and we must not suppose that he had any desire to fly with her away from her husband and Mary, even in a boat, to an Ionian Isle. But the hunger for a new passion was in him, and he indulged it, at any rate so far as to make verses about it. I cannot but think that he might have been better employed, even in the interests of his art. In such poems he took the line of least resistance, and was not training himself for greater tasks. No one else has done this kind of thing so well, but there is a futility in the idea which betrays itself even in the language. The last two lines would go well with the music of Balfe.

It is quite plain that Edward Williams did not take Shelley's passion for Jane seriously. He was only flattered that a divine poet should say such pretty things of his wife, and, no doubt, Jane was flattered too. As for Mary, she must have known there was no real danger; but Trelawny tells us that she was subject to jealousy, and did not like Shelley to write poems to other women. Trelawny appears to think this unreasonable in her; but no woman would be pleased if her husband told another woman that he was unhappy at home, even if he told it in verse.



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'THE NORTH-WEST PASSAGE' (PORTRAIT OF E. J. TRELAWNY IN OLD AGE)

FROM THE PAINTING BY SIR J. E. MILLAIS

CHAPTER XIV

THE LAST YEAR

SHELLEY now saw much of Byron and Byron's friends. He also made a new friend, who has given us as vivid and full an account of the last year of his life as Hogg of his Oxford days. Edward John Trelawny, who was a year younger than Shelley, had already begun to live a life of adventure. He had read and admired Shelley's poetry, and had heard from Medwin and Williams that Shelley himself was as remarkable as his works. He came to Italy, partly to shoot in the Maremma, partly to see Shelley. Having fulfilled his first purpose, he arrived at Pisa on January 14, 1822, to accomplish his second. From this time he was constantly in Shelley's society, and became his devoted friend. He had his faults, and we cannot trust all that he says. Indeed, Byron called him a liar. In some things he was capricious, but not in his affection for Shelley. It is a great piece of luck for Shelley's biographers that Trelawny should, like Hogg, have had a natural gift for writing, and yet should have been free from Hogg's tiresome trick of talking about himself irrelevantly. The Shelley he describes is the same man as Hogg's Shelley, except that his is more mature and more delightful. Trelawny has this further advantage over Hogg that he gives us Shelley in company and in contrast with another man of genius. His Byron, though represented with little affection, is even more living than his Shelley, and attracts us in spite of all his poses and follies. Trelawny makes him human, and even pathetic, although he seems to write of him coolly and sceptically. A biographer of Shelley must be tempted to quote very freely from Trelawny, but, since his book is now easy to buy, I shall not quote from it more than I can help.

His account of his first meeting with Shelley is well known. As soon as he arrived at Pisa, he went to the Tre Palazzi, " where the Shelleys and Williamses lived on different flats under the same roof." He was talking to the Williamses when, he tells us, " I was rather put out by observing in the passage near the open door, opposite to where I sat, a pair of glittering eyes steadily fixed on mine." Mrs. Williams went to the doorway and said, laughing, " Come in, Shelley, it's only our friend Tre just arrived."

Shelley glided in, blushing like a girl. Trelawny as astonished at his flushed, feminine, and artless face. At first he sat silent; but, when Jane Williams asked him what work he had in his hand, his face brightened and he answered briskly:

" Calderon's *Magico Prodigioso.* I am translating some passages in it."

Jane then asked him to read it. Trelawny was astonished at the ease with which he translated the most subtle and imaginative passages of the Spanish poet. " After this touch of his quality, I no longer doubted his identity; a dead silence ensued; looking up, I asked: 'Where is he?' Mrs. Williams said, 'Who? Shelley? Oh, he comes and goes like a spirit, no one knows when or where.' "

The next day Trelawny saw Shelley in company with Byron. Byron without Shelley, he says, tried to talk like a man of the world and disappointed him. Shelley, on the contrary, " never laid aside his book and magic mantle; he waved his wand, and Byron, after a faint show of defiance, stood mute."

" I was pleased and surprised," Trelawny says, " at Byron's passiveness and docility in listening to Shelley; but all who heard him felt the charm of his simple, earnest manner." Byron, he says, never talked seriously and confidentially with any person but Shelley. The contrast between them in society was as marked as their characters. Byron was ill at ease, and affected to care only for trifles. Shelley, " not thinking of himself, was as much at ease as in his own home, omitting no occasion of obliging those whom he came in contact with, readily conversing with all or any who addressed him, irrespective of age or rank, dress or address."

When Trelawny was telling Shelley what he thought of Byron, Shelley called his wife, and said :

" Mary, Trelawny has found out Byron already. How stupid we were ; how long it took us."

" That," she replied, " is because he lives with the living, and we with the dead."

Poor Mary was anxious to live more with the living. Though she was the wife of a poet, and herself a writer of romances, she had a woman's natural liking for ordinary society. Indeed, she seems to have grown a little tired of extraordinary people, except her husband, and liked to hear the gossip of London. Shelley, though Trelawny says that he was easy and polite in all societies, disliked any company except that of his intimate friends. He never cared to talk of trifling things, and in general conversation was apt to remain silent, and to glide away as soon as he got a chance. But sometimes he would shut his books and " indulge in the wildest flights of mirth and folly," shrieking and laughing until strangers thought he must be mad. " Poor Mary," he said to Trelawny, " hers is a sad fate. She can't bear solitude, nor I society—the quick coupled with the dead."

Although Shelley was never happy far from a river or the sea, and spent much of his time in a boat, he could not swim at all. Trelawny tells us that once, when he was bathing in a deep pool in the Arno, Shelley said mournfully, " Why can't I swim ? It seems so very easy." Trelawny told him that he could not swim only because he thought he could not. Thereupon Shelley resolved to try. He plunged in, but lay stretched out at the bottom like a conger eel, making no effort to save himself. Trelawny fished him out, and he said, " I always find the bottom of a well, and they say Truth lies there. In another minute I should have found it, and you would have found an empty shell. It is an easy way of getting rid of the body." Trelawny remarks that " the careless, not to say impatient, way in which the poet bore his burden of life, caused a vague dread to his family and friends that he might lose or cast it away at any moment." He seems, like some of the great saints, to have had no instinct of self-preservation; not from lack of vitality, but because his mind was almost independent of his body, so that he was in danger of parting with it in a mere fit of forgetfulness as other men part with their umbrellas. Trelawny tells us how he once left him at ten in the morning, reading a German folio, and returned at six in the evening to find him still reading the same folio. Trelawny asked him to come to dinner. He said that he had dined; but Trelawny pointed to a plate containing bread and cold meat that was on a book-shelf, and asked him what it was. "That," he answered, colouring, "why, that must be my dinner. It's very foolish; I thought I had eaten it." Trelawny then lugged him into the dining-room; but, even there, he brought a book with him and read more than he ate. "He seldom ate at stated periods, but only when hungry—and then like the birds, if he saw something edible lying about." It was no wonder that he suffered from indigestion. Trelawny thought that he had nothing else the matter with him, for he could outwalk every one, and that he might have lived to be as old as his father.

The Shelleys and Williamses had formed a plan of going to the Bay of Spezzia together for the summer of 1822. Both Shelley and Williams were anxious to have a boat. Trelawny showed them the model of an American schooner, and it was resolved that Trelawny should write at once to a friend of his at Genoa, a Captain Roberts, commissioning him to build a boat for them. Mary said laughingly to Jane, "Our husbands decide without asking our consent or having our concurrence; for, to tell you the truth, I hate this boat, though I say nothing." "So do I," said Jane; "but speaking would be useless, and only spoil their pleasure." On February 7, 1822, Shelley and Williams went to Spezzia to find a house for the summer. They searched all along the bay in vain, but the boat was ordered and the summer visit to the sea could not be given up.

In January Shelley had written to Peacock: "Lord Byron is established here, and we are constant companions. No small relief this, after the dreary solitude of the understanding and the imagination in which we passed the first years of our expatriation, yoked to all sorts of miseries and discomforts." He added that his health was better and his cares lighter. No doubt he got much pleasure and profit from the society of Byron. Men of great genius, however kindly and humble they may be, must grow sometimes weary of living with their intellectual inferiors, with those to whom they must explain laboriously whatever most interests themselves. Byron was the only one of Shelley's friends who had a mind as quick and keen and powerful as his own. They were both lonely in their greatness, and therefore drawn together in spite of many differences. Byron was urged by his friends in England not to associate too much with Shelley. "To-day I had another letter warning me against the snake,"[1] he said to Trelawny. "He alone in this age of humbug dares stem the current, as he did to-day the flooded Arno in his skiff, although I could not observe he made any progress. The attempt is better than being swept along, as all the rest are, with the filthy garbage scoured from its banks." Indeed Byron clung to Shelley for companionship, and was, Mary Shelley wrote in March when there were differences between them, in a terrible fright lest Shelley should desert him. These differences arose out of the old trouble about Claire's child, Allegra. Claire believed, and with reason, that Allegra could not be properly cared for in the Capuchin convent, where she was being educated; and her anxieties increased when Byron left Ravenna and there was no one to look after Allegra. She wrote entreating Byron to let her see Allegra, but he did not answer her letter. Then she formed wild schemes for kidnapping Allegra, from which Shelley dissuaded her. He agreed to intercede with Byron, but got nothing from him; indeed he came away from the interview in a passion, saying that he could have knocked Byron down with pleasure, and almost provoked to challenge him to a duel. "No sentiments of honour or justice restrain him (as I strongly suspect)," he wrote to Claire, "from the basest insinuations, and the only mode in which I could effectually silence him I am reluctant (even if I had proof) to employ during my father's life. But for your immediate feelings, I would suddenly and irrevocably leave the country which he inhabits, nor ever enter it but as an enemy to determine our differences without words."

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[1] A nickname which Byron had given to Shelley. He also called him Shiloh.

Shelley seems to have had a suspicion that Byron had spread slanders about his relations with Claire. Byron certainly had professed to the Hoppners to believe the story about the Swiss nurse. When exasperated he would believe or say anything of anybody, and he was therefore more dangerous as a friend than as an enemy.

But Shelley could not break with Byron, even if after his first resentment he wished to do so, lest he should injure the interests of Leigh Hunt. Hunt could not get out to Italy without money. He got some from Shelley, and asked Shelley to get more from Byron. On January 15 Shelley sent to Hunt £150 which he had scraped together. Byron, he said, was disposed to be kind, and had assigned a portion of his palace to Hunt, and had paid for furnishing it "with that sort of unsuspecting goodness which makes it infinitely difficult to ask him for more." "Past circumstances," he continued, "render it *impossible* that I should accept any supply from him for my own use, or that I should ask it for yours if the contribution could be supposed in any manner to relieve me, or to do what I could otherwise have done." Yet Shelley was determined to do all he could to help the helpless Hunt, and, on February 15, he wrote to Byron saying that Hunt had urged him more than once to ask Byron to lend him money. "My answer consisted in sending him all I could spare, which I have now literally done." "I do not think poor Hunt's promise to pay in a given time is worth very much," he continues, "but mine is less subject to uncertainty, and I should be happy to be responsible for any engagement he may have proposed to you." Byron lent Hunt £200 on Shelley's bond, and Shelley did all he could to keep the fickle Byron in conceit with the idea of his partnership with Hunt.

But he found it more and more difficult to do anything for Hunt. Hunt had been expected in Italy before the end of 1821. His rooms had been made ready for him and a cook hired. In March Shelley was still urging him to come. Byron had been wavering about the project of the journal, but now he was eager for it again and impatient to see Hunt. "Particular circumstances," Shelley wrote on March 2, "or rather, I should say, particular dispositions in Lord Byron's character, render the close and exclusive intimacy with him in which I find myself intolerable to me; this much, my best friend, I will confess and confide to you. No feelings of my own shall injure or interfere with what is now nearest to them—your interest—and I will take care to preserve the little influence I may have over this Proteus in whom such strange extremes are reconciled."

This is only one instance out of many of Shelley's unwearied kindness to his friends. It mattered not to him that Hunt was like a helpless chick that expects food to be dropped into its open mouth. In friendship he expected nothing and gave everything, endless pains as well as money; and that in a manner so delicate that his friends bore the burden of their obligations to him only too easily. At the beginning of 1822 he set himself to write a tragedy on Charles I., which he had begun and laid aside in 1819. His object in writing it was to make some money for Hunt. He meant it for the stage. "It is affectation," he thought, "to say we write a play for any other purpose." In style and manner he wished to approach as near as he could to Shakespeare, but was amazed at his own presumption. He seems to have had some misgivings about this and other attempts to revive the Elizabethan drama; for he told Trelawny that, considering the labour requisite to excel in composition, he thought it would be better to stick to one style. In April he said that the poetry succeeded very well; but that he could not seize on the conception of the subject as a whole, and that now he seldom touched the canvas. In fact "Charles I." was a piece of task-work, and he abandoned it in despair in June. Four scenes have come down to us, and the fragment of a fifth, all in an imperfect state. They contain a good deal of eloquent talk, but there is no movement and little character in them. Archy, the Fool, is drawn after the fool in King Lear. The Queen calls him shrewd and bitter, but his speeches are mere academic exercises in a style that is nothing if not natural. His song, "A widow bird sat mourning for her love," is the best thing in the whole fragment; and it has nothing to do with the play. The effort to write against the grain dulled Shelley's inspiration, and he complained that he could write nothing. But still he was busy translating, and produced some beautiful lyrics; in particular three addressed to Jane Williams, "The Invitation," "The Recollection," and "With a Guitar." Trelawny tells us how he found Shelley writing the last of these in a pine forest. He picked up the manuscript. "It was a fearful scrawl, words smeared out with his finger, and one upon the other, over and over in tiers and all run together 'in most admired disorder'; it might have been taken for a sketch of a marsh overgrown with bulrushes, and the blots for wild ducks."

Shelley said, "When my brain gets heated with thought, it soon boils, and throws off images and words faster than I can skim them off. In the morning, when cooled down, out of the rude sketch, as you justly call it, I shall attempt a drawing." This, so far as we know, is the method of most great poets. They write at a great pace and then revise and reduce. Shelley did neither so carefully as Virgil or Milton. He seems, like many modern artists, to have valued spontaneity above everything, and, in his shorter poems, his method justifies itself. We must not suppose, because he often wrote hastily and left uncorrected what needed correction, that he was not a great master of technique. He was a far greater master than many careful poets who give us no lines obviously imperfect. He had a greater command of all metres, except the anapæstic, than any poet between Milton and William Morris; and he proved his mastery more even in simple metres than in difficult ones. In "The Invitation" and "With a Guitar" he makes the metre of "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" his own, lighter, swifter, and freer than it had ever been before:—

"When the night is left behind
In the deep east, dun and blind,
And the blue noon is over us
And the multitudinous
Billows murmur at our feet,
Where the earth and ocean meet,
And all things seem only one
In the universal sun."

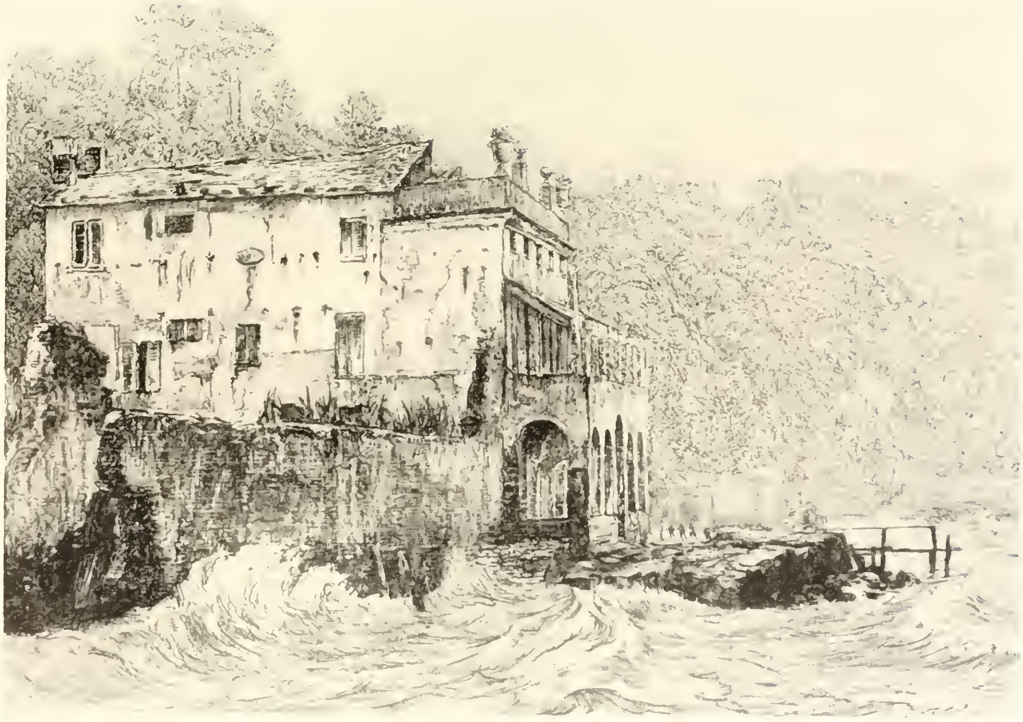
Shelley wrote greater poems than these, but none more spontaneous, none that communicates more delight from its own happy accomplishment.

In the middle of April Claire and the Williamses went to Spezzia again to look for houses. They had only just gone when the Shelleys received the news that Allegra had died of typhus fever. Two days afterwards Claire and the Williamses returned, saying they had found only one house, the Villa Magni, which was on the east side of the Bay of Spezzia, near the village of San Terenzo. Shelley did not tell Claire of her loss at once; for Byron was close at hand, and she might have done anything in her fury against him. His one idea was to get her away from Pisa. Therefore he insisted that Mary and Claire should go at once with Trelawny to the Villa Magni, and he would have their furniture taken by boat to Lerici, a small town near the villa. The Williamses also must come with their furniture, although there was only one house for both families. He had his way. On April 26 Mary, Claire, and Trelawny set out. The next day Shelley and the Williamses started for Lerici. The Williamses could not find another house, so Shelley said that room must be made for them in the Casa Magni, which Mary succeeded in taking. There were great difficulties with the furniture at the custom-house; but these were overcome, and they were all in the Casa Magni on May 1.

Claire said she would go back to Florence at once. The rest of the party were discussing what should be done when she came into the room, saw that something was the matter, and asked whether Allegra was dead. Thus the news broke itself to her. After a day she became tranquil, and, on May 21, went to Florence.

The smaller and eastern division of the Bay of Spezzia is called the Bay of Lerici. The Casa Magni is in the depth of this smaller bay. Mary Shelley has described the situation and country for us. The sea came close up to the door, and there was a steep hill behind. The bay was almost landlocked. To the east was the Castle of Lerici, and to the west Porto Venere. The beach was enclosed by precipitous rocks, over which there was only a rough footpath to Lerici. There were no sands or shingle on the shore. Some fine ilex and walnut trees remained in Mary's memory. The whole scene, she says, was of unimaginable beauty. But for various reasons she almost hated the spot, even before she underwent the greatest sorrow of her life in it. The natives, she says, were wilder than the place. The people of San Terenzo were savages who would go by howling on the beach, the women dancing among the waves. They had great difficulty in getting even the poorest food. "Had we been wrecked on an island in the South Seas, we could scarcely have felt ourselves farther from civilisation and comfort." Besides this she was not in a fit state of health to endure such a life, and was troubled, perhaps, by Shelley's affection for Jane Williams. However that may be, there is no doubt that she was unhappy during the last months of her married life, and that there was some estrangement between her and Shelley, which no doubt would have passed away, but which she remembered with vain bitterness afterwards.

Trelawny tells us that "the Villa Magni looked more



CASA MAGNI, SAN TERENZIO

FROM AN ETCHING BY ARTHUR EVERSHED AFTER THE WATER COLOUR DRAWING BY HENRY RODERICK NEWMAN

like a boat- or bathing-house than a place to live in. It consisted of a terrace or ground floor, unpaved, and used for storing boat-gear and fishing-tackle, and of a single storey over it, divided into a hall or saloon and four small rooms, which had once been white-washed. There was one chimney for cooking. . . . The only good thing about it was a verandah facing the sea and almost over it." The servants lived in an outhouse. The house was so near the sea that in a storm spray swept the verandah and dashed against the windows. Both Mary and Trelawny remark that it was like being in a ship.

Shelley was boyishly eager for the arrival of the new boat. Its design did not please Trelawny. Williams had brought with him, on leaving England, the sections of a boat as a model to build from, designed by a naval officer. Both he and Shelley insisted that their craft should be built exactly on the same lines, although Captain Roberts and the builder at Genoa protested. "Williams," says Trelawny, "was on ordinary occasions as humble-minded as Shelley, but having been two or three years in the navy, and then in the cavalry, he thought there was no vanity in his believing that he was as good a judge of a boat or a horse as any man." When the boat was finished, "it took two tons of iron ballast to bring her down to her bearings, and then she was very crank in a breeze, though not deficient in beam." She was fast, strongly built, and Torbay-rigged. Trelawny sent her from Genoa, under charge of two steady seamen and a smart sailor lad, aged eighteen, named Charles Vivian. The boat arrived on May 12. Shelley only kept the boy and sent back the two seamen, in spite of their caution that they were needed. Williams declared the boat to be perfect, and Shelley said that she passed the small craft as a comet might pass the dullest planet of the heavens. But she was thoroughly undermanned; for, though the boy was quick and handy, Williams was over-anxious and wanted practice, and Shelley worse than useless. He was set to steer, and did so with a book in his hand, saying that "he could read and steer at the same time, as one was mental, the other mechanical."

When Williams cried, "Luff," he would put the helm the wrong way. Then he was put in charge of the main sheet. He was told to let it go, whereupon it jammed and the boat became unmanageable. His hat was knocked overboard, and he would have followed it if Trelawny had not held him. Then Williams blew him up, whereupon he "put his beloved Plato in his pocket and gave his mind up to fun and frolic." Trelawny told Williams that they ought to get a Genoese sailor, accustomed to the coast, but Williams would not hear of it. In spite of his occasional high spirits at this time, Shelley was still often occupied with thoughts of death. Soon after his arrival at the Casa Magni he thought he saw Allegra rise naked from the sea, and clap her hands and smile at him. In a letter to Trelawny, who was then at Leghorn, he asked him to get some prussic acid. His wish to possess it, he said, was serious, and sprang from the desire of avoiding needless suffering. "I need not tell you," he added, "I have no intention of suicide at present, but I confess it will be a comfort to me to hold in my possession that Golden Key to the chamber of perpetual rest." One calm sultry evening he asked Jane, with her two babies, to come with him in a skiff as light as a coracle which he had had built. All his friends were accustomed to do what Shelley wished, and Jane did so this time, squatting with her children in the bottom of the boat. Shelley rowed round a jutting promontory into deep water before Jane was aware that they were out of their depth. After pulling out a long way, Shelley rested on his oars and sank into a deep reverie. Jane, spellbound by terror, for any movement would upset the boat, kept her eyes upon him. She made several remarks, but got no answer. "She saw death in his eyes." Suddenly he raised his head, his brow cleared, his face brightened, and he exclaimed joyfully:

"Now let us together solve the great mystery." Jane, made brave and clever by the presence of her babies, said in her usual cheerful voice:

"No, thank you, not now; I should like my dinner first, and so would the children."

The spell was broken, and Shelley paddled back. As soon as Jane saw the sandy bottom, she snatched up her babies, and clambered out so hurriedly that the punt was capsized. Naturally she vowed she would never go in a boat with Shelley again. "Who can predict what he will do?" she cried. "And he casts a spell over everything. You can form some notion of what other people will do, as they partake of our common nature—not what he will do. He is seeking after what we all avoid, death. I wish we were away. I shall always be in terror."

But Jane played on her guitar to him in the summer evenings, and he spent the summer days upon the water. It is sad to think that Mary did not share his happiness. She was again with child, and her spirits were low. Afterwards she wrote: "No words can tell you how I hated our house and the country about it. . . . The beauty of the woods made me weep and shudder. . . . My only moments of peace were on board that unhappy boat—when, lying down with my head on his knee, I shut my eyes and felt the wind and our swift motion alone." In May, Shelley wrote to Claire that Mary still continued to suffer terribly from languor and hysterical affections. Even Jane, he said, pined after her own house and saucepans. He thought it a pity that any one so pretty and amiable should be so selfish. On June 16, Mary, after a week of illness, suffered a severe miscarriage. There was no doctor to be got; so Shelley took matters into his own hands, and, by making her sit in ice, checked the hæmorrhage and fainting fits. She soon began to recover, but still suffered much from depression. Shelley seems not to have understood that no woman is herself in such a case; for, in a letter to Mr. Gisborne, written on June 18, he says: "I only feel the want of those who can feel, and understand me. Whether from proximity, or the continuity of domestic intercourse, Mary does not. The necessity of concealing from her thoughts that would pain her necessitates this perhaps. It is the curse of Tantalus that a person possessing such excellent powers and so pure a mind as hers should not excite the sympathy indispensable to their application to domestic life." Here we see Shelley at his worst. In this mood he is as far from his best self as these cold and pompous phrases are from his most divine poems. But there is a vast difference between the best and worst of all men except those who have neither vices nor virtues. The important question in each case is whether the best or the worst is growing stronger. In Shelley the best was always growing stronger in spite of the fact that he seems to have been unaware of his worst faults. Byron said that Shelley was the best and least selfish man he ever knew, a man who had made more sacrifices of his fortunes and feelings for others than any he had ever heard of. This was the dominant fact about him. His chief aim was, not to live comfortably himself, but to make all life more like his ideal of it. This aim was expressed both in his actions and in his art, and he would make any sacrifice to accomplish it. But, being sure of the righteousness of his aim, he expected every one else to be dominated by it and to share his own enthusiasm. "His flashing eyes and vehement, eager manner," says Trelawny, "determined on the instant execution of any project that took his fancy, however perilous. He overbore all opposition in those less self-willed than he was." Mary was his wife, and he expected her to be a part of himself and to share all his moods. He could not always make allowances for the weakness of the flesh in her, or for the fact that she was a woman with the separate instincts and purposes of her sex. It was mere selfishness in Jane, he thought, that she should pine after her own house and saucepans, when he and Williams wanted to live together in a beautiful wilderness. And, when Mary had no energies left to share his dreams and raptures, he rushed to the conclusion that she did not understand him. He could not see that she had her own separate and important business in life, to which she was powerfully drawn by nature, and that, as she was bearing his children, it was his duty to give her all the help he could. It was the same trouble over again that had estranged him from Harriet; but this time, no doubt, it was only a passing trouble. He had lost, for a while, the delight of his love for Mary, but not the love itself; and the delight would have returned to make him more conscious of the love.

In little things he must often have been a trying husband, and the more trying as his wife's womanly instincts grew stronger with maternity. Trelawny tells us how once a visitor from Genoa was expected to whom Shelley was anxious to do honour. He disappeared beforehand, as usual, but under promise to be back in good time, so that Mary might brush his hair and smarten him up. The visitor arrived, anxious to see the poet; but not the poet himself. They sat down to dinner without him. Trelawny, who sometimes tries to make a good story too good, says that some one was just remarking that genius purifies, and that the naked statues of the Greeks are modest, when the talk was interrupted by a concussion of glass and crockery, and one of the ladies cried, "Oh, my gracious!" She had good reason. For there was the poet, "washed, indeed, for he was just out of the sea;" but not in an evening costume, nor, indeed, in any costume at all. "Small fragments of sea-weed clung to his hair, and he was odorous of the salt brine—he scorned encumbering himself with combs or towels." But for the lady's exclamation he might not have been seen, for he was gliding noiselessly round the two sides of the saloon to his room; and the Italian maid, with accustomed tact, walked by his side, carefully screening him from the company. Being discovered, he thought it necessary to explain, so stopping beside the lady who had cried out, he said: "How can I help it? I must go to my room to get my clothes; there is no way to get to it but through this. At this hour I have always found this place vacant. I have not altered my hour of bathing, but you have changed yours for dining." It appeared that the boat had upset all his clothes into the water.

He then glided from the puddle he had made on the floor to the dormitory, and reappeared in a few minutes, taking his place at table, and unconscious that he had done anything to offend any one.

All this time he was occupied with the last of his longer poems, "The Triumph of Life," which he left unfinished. There was about 540 lines of it, with here and there a word or part of a line wanting; enough to show that his powers of execution had never been so great, though not enough for any certain judgment of the conception and design. "The Triumph of Life" is written in *terza rima,* a very difficult metre in English, but handled here with wonderful mastery. Its interwoven rhymes favoured Shelley's tendency to run on from one image to another until his original purpose was almost lost in images. "The Triumph of Life" is as difficult to follow as those modern symphonic poems in which the themes fade into each other and are obscured by the richness of the orchestration. But perhaps Shelley could have lessened this obscurity on revision. In the existing state of the poem we can only form a vague notion of its theme, and we cannot tell whether that theme would have proved worthy of the splendid execution. The poem opens with a description of sunrise, which has a Miltonic stateliness and many Miltonic phrases, together with all the lyrical swiftness and high, keen music of Shelley. Then, as he lies on the steep of a green Apennine, a vision comes to him of the Triumph of Life. In this vision he expresses his own bewildered sense of the blind, fierce energy of men, the—

> "Dreams of the proud man, making great
> And greater ever
> Things which are not of God."

He sees a stream of people—

> "Numerous as gnats upon the evening gleam,
>
> All hastening onward, yet none seemed to know
> Whither he went, or whence he came, or why
> He made one of the multitude, and so
>
> Was borne amid the crowd, as through the sky
> One of the million leaves of summer's bier;
> Old age and youth, manhood and infancy,

> Mixed in one mighty torrent did appear,
> Some flying from the thing they feared, and some
> Seeking the object of another's fear."

Then—

> "A cold glare, intenser than the noon,
> But icy cold, obscured with blinding light
> The sun, as he the stars."

And in it there appeared a chariot driven by a Janus-visaged shadow, with all his four faces blinded by a bandage. About this chariot a captive multitude was driven, including all the great and wretched of the earth—

> "All but the sacred few who could not tame
> Their spirits to the conquerors—but as soon
> As they had touched the world with living flame,
>
> Fled back like eagles to their native noon,
> Or those who put aside the diadem
> Of earthly thrones or gems. . . .
>
> Were there, of Athens or Jerusalem,
> Were neither 'mid the mighty captives seen,
> Nor 'mid the ribald crowd that followed them."

I quote this fragmentary and obscure passage, because it suggests to us what the development of the poem might have been. Most men, Shelley implies, are the slaves of life and subdued to its mechanical purposes, even when they seem to be the masters of the world. Only a few, such as Jesus or Socrates, deliver themselves from that slavery and make a purpose and desires for themselves and according to their own ideals.

The rest of the vision is expounded by Rousseau, himself one of the captives. He points out Napoleon—

> "Whose grasp had left the giant world so weak,
> That every pigmy kicked it as it lay."

And other "spoilers spoiled," Voltaire, Frederick, Paul, Catherine, and Leopold—

"For in the battle Life and they did wage,
She remained conqueror. I was overcome
By my own heart alone, which neither age,

Nor tears, nor infamy, nor now the tomb
Could temper to its object."

Then he compares himself with the great bards of elder time—

"Who quelled

The passions which they sung, as by their strain
May be well known: their living melody
Tempers its own contagion to the vein

Of those who are infected with it—I
Have suffered what I wrote, or viler pain!
And so my words have seeds of misery—

Even as the deeds of others, not as theirs."

Here Shelley proves that at the end of his days he was learning the great truth that the masterpieces of art express mastered passions, and that in them the expression of these passions is only a means to an end and not an end in itself; the end of all great art being to represent a heightened and ennobled state of being or the promise of it, whatever means may be employed.

After this the poem loses itself more and more in a long description by Rousseau of a vision, and of how he came to join in the Triumph of Life. Here Shelley seems to concern himself, as often before, rather with the description itself than with the significance of what is described. This would be well enough if he were telling us of real things, interesting in themselves; but since he is telling us of visions, whose interest is only in their relation to reality, we are bewildered when we cannot grasp that relation. It is doubtful whether Shelley would ever have enabled us to grasp it, whether the poem would have fulfilled the promise which Professor Dowden finds in it. It grows no clearer towards the end, but breaks off with the words—

"Then, what is life? I cried——"

There were warnings and portents in the last weeks of Shelley's life. He saw the figure of himself which met him as he walked on the terrace, and said to him, "How long do you mean to be content?" He was also seen by Jane Williams in a place where he certainly was not. On the night after he was drowned a friend dreamed that he came to her looking pale and melancholy. She told him to sit down and eat. "I shall never eat more," he said. "I have not a soldo left in the world." She answered, "This is no inn. You need not pay." "Perhaps," he said, "it is the worse for that." Then she awoke, and falling asleep again, dreamed that Shelley was dead, and woke crying bitterly. The next day she mentioned her dream and said she hoped all was well with the Shelleys. On June 19 news came that the Hunts had reached Genoa. On July 1 that they had set out for Leghorn. As there was a favouring breeze, Shelley determined to sail to Leghorn to welcome Hunt. Williams went with him, and Mary, still weakened by her miscarriage, was full of apprehensions. "I called Shelley back two or three times," she wrote afterwards, "and told him that if I did not see him soon, I would go to Pisa with the child; I cried bitterly when he went away." This was their last parting. The boat reached Leghorn that evening, and they spent the night sleeping in her. The next day Shelley and Hunt met in a hotel at Leghorn. Shelley rushed into Hunt's arms with a cry of delight. They went on to Pisa together, and saw the sights of the town on July 7. Every one noticed that Shelley was in better health and spirits than ever before; yet he said to Mrs. Hunt, "If I die to-morrow, I have lived to be older than my father. I am ninety years of age." The day before Jane Williams had written a letter to him which ended with these words, "Why do you talk of never enjoying moments like the past. Are you going to join your friend Plato, or do you expect I shall do so soon? *Buona notte.*"

On the evening of the 7th July Shelley said good-bye to the Hunts and drove to Leghorn. There had been a long spell of hot and dry weather, and the priests were praying for rain. On the 8th Captain Roberts feared a tempest, and advised Shelley to wait till the next day. But Williams was eager to return, and the wind was favourable. They sailed between 1 and 2 P.M., Trelawny, who had also gone to Leghorn, watching them through a glass. A Genoese sailor said to him that they ought to have started early in the morning, and that they were standing too much in shore. The boat was soon enveloped in a sea fog, and Trelawny saw no more of her. There was not a breath of air, and the heaviness of the atmosphere made Trelawny sleepy. He went down into the cabin of Byron's boat, in which he had come to Leghorn, and fell asleep. He was roused by a noise overhead, and went on deck. It was then half-past six. "The sea was of the colour, and looked as solid and smooth, as a sheet of lead, and covered with an oily scum. . . . There was a commotion in the air, as of many threatening sounds coming upon us from the sea. Fishing-craft and coasting vessels, under bare poles, rushed by us in shoals, running foul of the ships in the harbour." Suddenly a thunder-squall burst right overhead. It only lasted twenty minutes, and then Trelawny looked anxiously seaward in the hope of seeing Shelley's boat, but could not do so.

The next day Trelawny's Genoese mate pointed out to him, on board a fishing-boat, an English-made oar that he thought he had seen on Shelley's boat. But the crew swore it was not so. On the morning of the third day Trelawny rode to Pisa, where he found Byron. He hoped there would be a letter from the Casa Magni announcing their safe arrival, but there was none. He told Byron of his fears, and Byron's lip quivered and his voice faltered as he questioned Trelawny. He sent a courier to Leghorn to despatch Byron's boat, the *Bolivar,* to cruise along the bay, and rode himself towards it. At Via Reggio he heard that a punt, a water-keg, and some bottles had been found on the beach. He recognised them as belonging to Shelley's boat. Nothing more was found for some days.

Meanwhile Mary and Jane were waiting for their husbands at Casa Magni. The night of the 8th July, on which the boat had set sail, was tempestuous. On the 10th there was a fair wind from Leghorn, and several feluccas arrived thence in the evening. Williams had written that they would be back by the 11th at latest, and when midnight came, and Mary and Jane did not see the tall sails of the boat double the promontory, they began to fear that their husbands had been kept by illness or bad news. Jane was so uneasy that she resolved to go the next day to Leghorn by boat, but it was too rough. At noon came a letter from Hunt to Shelley: "Pray write to tell us how you got home, for they say you had bad weather after you sailed on Monday, and we are anxious." Jane cried, "Then it is all over." "No, my dear Jane," said Mary, "it is not all over, but this suspense is dreadful." They determined to go to Leghorn, and crossed to Lerici. There their spirits were raised by hearing that no accident was known of. From Lerici they posted to Pisa. In Byron's palace the Guiccioli came to meet Mary, smiling, and Mary could scarcely ask, "Where is he—*sapete alcuna cosa di Shelley?*" They knew nothing except that he had sailed on Monday. Though it was twelve at night they went on at once to Leghorn, and got there about two in the morning. They did not know where Trelawny and Roberts were, but found Roberts at six. He told them all that was known. They still hoped that the boat might have been blown out to sea. They sent a courier from town to town along the coast to know if anything had been seen or found, and, at 9 A.M., left Leghorn with Trelawny for home. Near Via Reggio they heard of the boat and cask that had been washed ashore. Still, they hoped they had been thrown overboard because of the bad weather. When they got home, San Terenzo was illuminated for a festa. At such times the natives would spend the whole night dancing on the sands close to their door, "running into the sea, then back again, and screaming all the time one detestable air, the most dedestable in the world." It was July 13 when they got home, five days since the boat had sailed. On the 18th Trelawny left them to go to Leghorn. Towards evening of the next day Mary said to Jane, "If anything had been found on the coast, Trelawny would have returned to let us know. He has not returned, so I hope." But about seven o'clock he did return. The bodies had been found on the shore. Shelley's body had been cast up on the 18th, near Via Reggio, Williams's on the day before, three or four miles off. Trelawny recognised Shelley by his tall, slight figure, his jacket, and a volume of Sophocles in one pocket, a volume of Keats's Poems in the other. The Keats was doubled back as if it had been hastily thrust away. Williams was also identified beyond doubt. The boy, Charles Vivian, was washed up three weeks afterwards. On the 20th Trelawny took Mary and Jane to Pisa to the Hunts. Mary wished Shelley to be buried near his child in the cemetery at Rome. But there was a difficulty because of the quarantine laws. So it was determined to burn the bodies.[1] Trelawny had an iron furnace made at Leghorn, and laid in a stock of fuel and "such things as were said to be used by Shelley's much-loved Hellenes on their funeral pyres." He sailed on August 13 or 14 from Leghorn in Byron's boat to Via Reggio, and there made arrangements for the burning. On the 15th Byron and Hunt arrived. The body of Williams was burnt that day, the body of Shelley on the next. "The lovely and grand scenery that surrounded us," says Trelawny, "so exactly harmonised with Shelley's genius, that I could imagine his spirit soaring over us. . . . As I thought of the delight Shelley felt in such scenes of loveliness and grandeur whilst living, I felt we were no better than a pack of wild dogs in tearing out his battered

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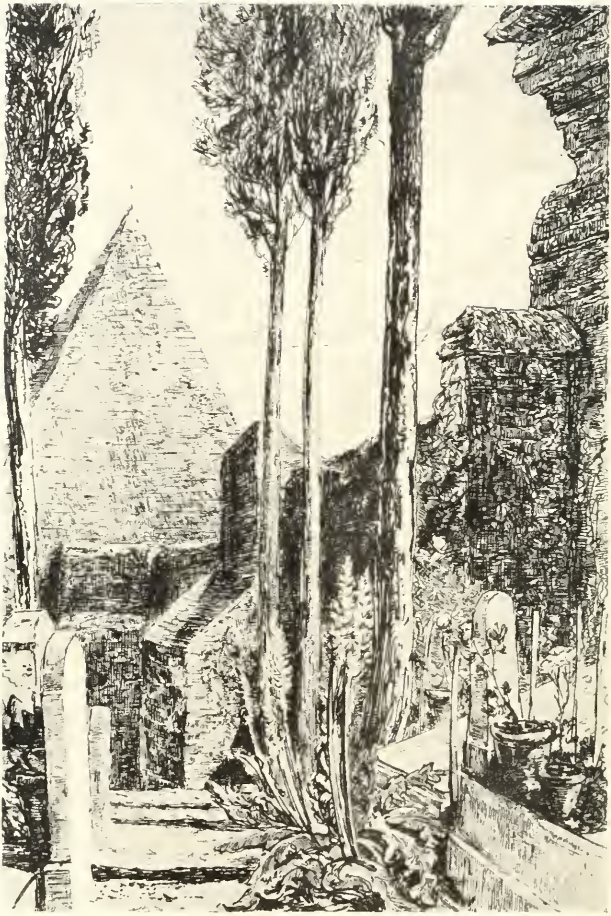
[1] Permission was obtained to remove them without burning, and they had therefore some difficulty in getting leave to burn them.



SHELLEY'S GRAVE

FROM AN ENGRAVING BY W. B. SCOTT

and naked body from the pure yellow sand that lay so lightly over it, to drag him back to the light of day." While the body was burning, "more wine was poured over it than he had consumed during his life. This, with the oil and salt, made the yellow flames glisten and quiver. The heat from the sun and fire was so intense that the atmosphere was tremulous and heavy." Byron could not face the scene, and swam off to his boat. The heart was not burnt and Trelawny snatched it from the furnace, burning his hand severely. He collected the ashes of his friend, and took them on board the *Bolivar* in a box. He gives this explanation of the fact that the heart was not burnt: "In all cases of death from suffocation the heart is gorged with blood. Consequently it is the more difficult to consume, especially in the open air."

The cemetery where Shelley's son William was buried had been closed, so his ashes were buried in a coffin in the new cemetery near by. Trelawny did not go to Rome till the spring of the next year. "When I came to examine the ground," he says, "I found Shelley's grave amid a cluster of others. The old Roman wall partly enclosed the place, and there was a niche in the wall formed by two buttresses—immediately under an ancient pyramid, said to be the tomb of Caius Cestius. There were no graves near it at that time. This suited my taste, so I purchased the recess, and sufficient space for planting a row of the Italian upright cypresses." Two tombs were built in the recess, and Trelawny removed Shelley's ashes to one of them. It was covered with a solid stone on which this inscription was placed:—

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

COR CORDIUM

NATUS IV AUG. MDCCXCII

OBIIT VIII JUL. MDCCCXXII

"Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange."

CONCLUSION

IT is easy to believe that there was a kind of natural fitness in the manner and time of Shelley's death. He seems to prepare us for it in his own poetry, speaking of himself as if he were a strange bird soaring through a few years of time, and cut short in the midst of its flight and music to sink headlong

> "On the heavy-sounding plain
> When the bolt has pierced its brain."

But of course he died by an evil chance just as much as any city clerk killed in a railway accident. Providence does not contrive matters like a novelist, so as to make a good story. There is perhaps a lurking notion that, being a great poet and the most extreme of all poets, Shelley was unfit to live in this gross world, and that therefore he was withdrawn from it, like Elijah, as a small compensation for the injustice that was done to him when he was born into it. Those who are inclined to be angry at the world's indifference to great poets should remember that the poets owe their very means of expression to the world. The language in which Shelley wrought his miracles was not invented at a stroke by his genius, but had grown slowly and painfully through the efforts of countless generations to express their higher and lower wants. Without it he would have been as inarticulate as a beast of the field. No poem that ever was written is so wonderful an achievement as the language it is written in, and that has been made by pork-butchers as well as by poets.

All great artists owe much to the world, and the notion that they do not could only have arisen in an age that did not understand the nature and function of art. Shelley had the misfortune to be born in such an age, and we must remember this fact when we consider the excellences and faults of his poetry. It is true that his time was rich in poetry. England then had not lost its vigour, as it proved both in war and peace; but the whole of Europe was bewildered by a great change in the life of man, which had many causes and had long been coming, but which only began to reach the height of its violence at the end of the eighteenth century. Its chief cause was a great increase in knowledge of all kinds, and its chief symptom an increase as vast in the material power of mankind through mechanical inventions. That power was and still is used very blindly; and Shelley lived in the midst of the anarchy of ideas produced by its blind use, and by other results of the increase of knowledge. Men then were so busy with knowledge, and its application as power, that they lost a great part of the wisdom which had been almost an instinct to their ancestors—the wisdom that knows which are the best things in life too well to argue about them. One of these best things is art, not so much the art of lonely men of genius, but the art produced by the labour and desire of a whole people. That kind of art, except in music, had been dying all over Europe for some time. In England it seemed to be as nearly dead as it ever can be until men become beasts again. But neither Shelley nor any great poet or artist of his time, except Blake, had any notion of what the world had lost and was losing. Every one then, like most people now, thought of works of art as necessarily produced by lonely men of genius without any help from the world and without any effort to please the world. Most of the romantic poets were possessed by this idea, and their poetry was profoundly influenced by it. It is the most individualist poetry that ever was written by great poets. The best of it is seldom concerned with the relations between man and man. Even when Wordsworth tried to deal with those relations, his finest verses express the secret processes of a single mind. Very early in life he gave up his dream of a joy in widest commonalty spread, and pursued rather the joy of private meditation and of sudden chance impressions. Only in his sonnets did he speak as the poet of a whole people, and then he was mainly concerned with the great struggle in which all the energies and imagination of England were absorbed.

Shelley only began to write well when the struggle was over, and when its evil effects were felt everywhere. Unlike Wordsworth and Coleridge he had no horror of the French Revolution, for he had never, like them, experienced the great disappointment that began with the Terror and that outbreak of war between England and France which seemed to make nonsense of the loftier hopes of man. They suffered a nervous shock through this disappointment from which Coleridge never recovered, and which made Wordsworth resolve that he would never again give his heart away to hope. From that time he was on his guard against his own enthusiasms, as a man who has once been ruptured is on his guard against violent effort. For him all men became individuals, and he was impatient of any theory of life which conceived of them as members of a great community or as able to attain to salvation by collective effort. But though he shared the common disillusionment he was still a lonely poet, for he could not make poetry out of that disillusionment. Shelley, on the other hand, was a lonely poet because of his vast and unshared dreams. He was a baby in arms when the older poets suffered their great disappointment. His nurse may have tried to frighten him with the name of Bonaparte; but, as he grew up, he saw only the evils of reaction against revolution. The Revolution itself was for him a false dawn that gave promise of a true one. But he lived among a people to whom it seemed a kind of Black Death, from which they were separated only by the Channel, and with which a few miscreants wished to infect them. Thus, when he dreamed his dreams of nations celebrating the millennium with festivals that were only too like those of the first glorious days of the Revolution, he knew that he must seem a devil-worshipper to the great mass of his own countrymen. Their imaginations were fired, if at all, by the glories of the Napoleonic War, which seemed to him to have reduced the victors to a wretched state of economic slavery. Thus he could take no patriotic pride in England as she was, nor could he conceive of her as developing by any natural or constitutional process into the ideal state of his dreams. He was no revolutionary when he came to consider particular measures, since he was by nature averse from bloodshed and violence. But in those dreams to which he gave all his heart and his genius, there is implied a revolution, not only in the nature of man, but in the whole order of the universe. Thus there was a gulf between his dreams and reality that he could only traverse by an arbitrary leap of his imagination. His practical politics were only the result of his sense of duty, and he cannot himself have ever supposed that the very moderate reforms for which he pleaded would even set men upon the road to that millennium which alone would satisfy him. Nothing in things as they were, or as they ever had been in England, had any power to fire his imagination. He could not, like William Morris, make an Earthly Paradise out of the best of what he knew of the Middle Ages; for he knew next to nothing of them, and what he did know he despised. Nor, like Morris, could he suppose that men would be happy if they could all live his life and do what he did; for there was something in all actual conditions of life, indeed in all possible conditions of it, that would baulk him of the delight which he most desired. That was a delight of passion without reaction, of appetite freed from all the laws of appetite, and at the same time of a soul supreme over the body, a delight, in fact, of heaven not of earth.

Thus he was a lonelier poet even than Wordsworth when he sang of his Paradise and of his grief that the world should be so unlike it; for he could not even persuade men that it was desirable, or that it would be anything but an inferno of uncontrolled demons. And so his genius was more and more driven into solitude, and forced to sing only to itself of things which only itself had conceived. Perhaps I have, in this book, said too much of the evils of this solitude. There is certainly something to be said on the other side. For these solitary poets are, as Ben Jonson said of Donne, the finest in the world for some things. Their very loneliness sets them thinking and feeling further than the poets who ease their minds among the common thoughts and feelings of mankind, so that they produce "things extreme and scattering bright," and have an audacity unchecked by any fear lest it shall frighten away their hearers. At his best Shelley sings like an angel for an audience of angels; for, however lonely, he is never an egotist, and does not talk to himself about himself. He would hold communion with men if he could, and always desired to love them and be loved by them. And, from his lack of this communion, he became the most intimate friend of nature that ever was. Often in his poetry he seems to sing to an audience of mountains and winds and clouds as if they would understand him better than the human beings who received his music with rage or laughter. His landscape poetry is not hampered by the effort to make pictures out of words; for his imagination, being thoroughly poetic, is concerned with the action of natural forces, not merely with their appearances. For him clouds and the sun and stars are as much alive as human beings; and often his human beings are only little figures under a great vault of sky, whose voices are scarcely heard amid the music of the earth and air. In "Prometheus" the persons of the myth are so like natural forces and the natural forces are so articulate, that we can scarcely distinguish between them. In "Adonais" the dead body of the poet and the figures of his mourners drift away like cloudy shapes upon the wind of inspiration that fills the close of the poem. And the reader, too, must surrender his mind to that wind, if he is to understand or enjoy Shelley's best poetry. He must not ask what is the use of it all, or why it gives him no valuable information about the character of men. He must have faith in it as a prophecy of a nobler state of being, and as the expression of emotions and ideas to which men in that nobler state may some day attain. But his faith must be reasonable and not given to that great mass of verse which Shelley wrote from the mere momentum and habit of composition. The indiscriminating admirers of a man of genius are his worst enemies, for their open-mouthed wonder soon turns to indifference and begets it. If we are to keep our love of poetry into middle age we must fortify it with a scientific interest; we must know that the work even of the greatest poets is sometimes good and sometimes bad, and we must try to discover when and why it is good or bad. The blind admirers talk, but they do not read. They live on the memory of their youthful raptures. Shelley, with his "clamorous sublimities," is so much the poet of youth that he is always in danger of being neglected by middle age. In this book I have written about him as a middle-aged man for other middle-aged men, and, since I have not ceased to read him myself, I hope that I may at least provoke others to renew the delight of their youth by reading him again.

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